

PS5 | PS4 | PSVR | RETRO

FINAL FANTASY
XVI REVIEWED

DOES THIS RPG
REINVENTION
SHINE?

PLAY

NO.1 FOR
PS5

PREVIEW
SPECIAL!

The 50 hottest games
coming to PlayStation
in 2023 and beyond

INCLUDING:

FINAL
FANTASY
VII REBIRTH

STAR
WARS
OUTLAWS

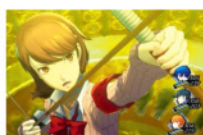
ALAN WAKE 2

MORTAL KOMBAT 1

ASSASSIN'S CREED MIRAGE

MARVEL'S SPIDER-MAN 2

Why two spiders are better than one for this PS5 must-play



→ LEVEL UP
**PERSONA'S BIG
FUTURE UNVEILED**

A remake, a spin-off, and a
new fantasy series – it's on!



→ WE WERE RIGHT
**SYNAPSE: THE BEST
PSVR2 GAME YET**

Telekinesis + guns = this year's
greatest FPS by a margin



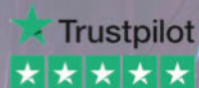
ISSUE 30 £5.99
SEPTEMBER 2023
gamesradar.com/n1



CHILLOUT GAMES

where gamers collect

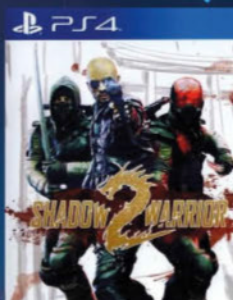
www.chilloutgames.co.uk/Sell



Get £££ cash for your games:



£16



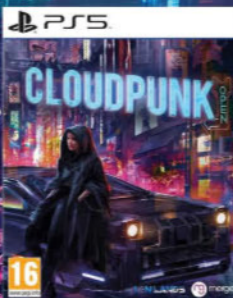
£49



£14



£20



£14



£83



£22



£38



£28

WITH FREE COURIER AND FAST PAYMENT

Prices valid 18/7/22 and subject to change daily. Prices are for PayPal (Shop Credit add 12% more). Chillout Games and retro-games.co.uk are trading names of Chillout Games Ltd. Full terms & conditions can be found at www.chilloutgames.co.uk



Welcome



We may not have had an E3 this year, but that doesn't mean the summer hasn't been a scorcher for games. In annual tradition, we're here to count down the Hot 50 (p23) upcoming

PlayStation games, and there's lots to get excited about. (We had to leave plenty on the cutting room floor.)

The list includes some new series entries we've been hyped about for years, now looming on the horizon. Marvel's Spider-Man 2 (p68) is set to be the first-party PS5 exclusive. Final Fantasy VII Rebirth (p64) looks like a glorious reimagining of one of our favourite PS1 worlds to get lost in, with heaps of fresh mystery and revamped party-based action combat. Armored Core 6 (p56) has FromSoftware putting that Dark Souls money where its iron-plated, mech-loving heart is to make one of the most decadent celebrations of the genre ever.

But this issue isn't just about putting numbers at the end of titles we recognise.



**STAY UPDATED
SIGN UP TO
OUR WEEKLY
NEWSLETTER**

There's plenty more in the oven as well, from unexpected twists on favourite IPs, like Ubisoft's open world Star Wars Outlaws (p44), to the completely new. Atlus moves away from Persona and Shin Megami Tensei for the high-fantasy RPG Metaphor (p6), Sonic Mania's devs debut a 3D platform character in Penny's Big Breakaway (p14), and even the PvP splatterer Foamstars (p40) impresses in our hands-on. The Hot 50 is packed with freshness and spilling out the sides, so get ready to refresh your Most Wanted list with something you didn't know about until now.

But what about the present? We've got reviews aplenty, including a massive verdict on Final Fantasy XVI (p78), one of PSVR2's most impressive games yet – Synapse (p86), and even a Crash (p89) that takes the spinning multiplayer. There's plenty to dig into, and we hope you enjoy reading all about your new favourites in the Hot 50. PS5 has been around for a few years now, but there's no signs of slowing down. It's just getting started!

Oscar Taylor-Kent
EDITOR

play@futurenet.com
@MrOscarTK

GAME OF THE MONTH
Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective
HOT 50 HIGHLIGHT
Marvel's Spider-Man 2

**SUBSCRIBE
NOW!**

SEE PAGE 74 FOR MORE DETAILS



Free wireless charger

Subscribe to PLAY – The Magazine and get a Joby Magnetic Wireless Charger worth **£29.95**, plus your magazine delivered every month.



Print only

If you just want a print edition, you'll pay from **£36.50** every six months (overseas options are available as well), so you never have to miss out.



Print & digital

The best of both worlds from **£44** every six months for iOS, Google, Kindle, and Android devices. See www.magazinesdirect.com

THIS MONTH'S HOT HEROES



Dashiell Wood
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Given a one-way ticket to crime town, Dash has had to prove he's the most devious [blorp!] in Rockay City.

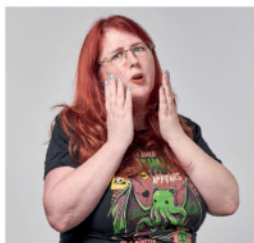
GAME OF THE MONTH
Diablo IV
HOT 50 HIGHLIGHT
Marathon



Jess Kinghorn
GAMES EDITOR

Fresh from Larian's Forgotten Realms HQ (Belgium), she's a bag-of-holding stuffed with Baldur's Gate lore.

GAME OF THE MONTH
Final Fantasy XVI
HOT 50 HIGHLIGHT
Alan Wake 2



Miriam McDonald
OPERATIONS EDITOR

Hawaii calls to Mim, but even unlimited Yakuza coins won't make Ichiban Kasuga appear on the beach.

GAME OF THE MONTH
Final Fantasy XVI
HOT 50 HIGHLIGHT
Like A Dragon: Infinite Wealth



Milford Coppock
MANAGING ART EDITOR

Another Marvel cover? The MCU actually stands for the Milford Cover Universe. Comics Code Authority: unapproved.

GAME OF THE MONTH
C-Smash VRS
HOT 50 HIGHLIGHT
Star Wars Outlaws



Ryan Robbins
TRAINEE DESIGNER

No lessons learned from the Matrix, Ryan is ready to graft PSVR2 directly into his nervous system.

GAME OF THE MONTH
Synapse
HOT 50 HIGHLIGHT
Lords Of The Fallen

Contents



MARVEL'S
SPIDER-MAN 2

ISSUE 30
SEPTEMBER 2023



068

Marvel's Spider-Man 2

Twice as many Spideys for your money

"THERE REALLY AREN'T MANY
RACING GAMES WITH THIS
LEVEL OF SOPHISTICATION."

096 F1 23

Regulars

016 In the mood for... deliveries

115 Next issue

Insider

006 Persona remake/spinoffs

010 PS5 streaming

011 Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney
Trilogy

012 The Chill 10

014 Penny's Big Breakaway

015 Fate/Samurai Remnant

018 Opinion #1

020 Opinion #2

Previews

023 The Hot 50

The very best games coming your
way, this year and beyond.

024 Shadow Gambit: The Cursed Crew

026 Lies Of P

026 Banishers: Ghosts Of New Eden

026 Stampede: Racing Royale

027 Alone In The Dark

027 Like A Dragon: Infinite Wealth

028 Classified: France '44

028 Helldivers 2

028 Blasphemous 2

029 Sonic Superstars

030 Prince Of Persia: The Lost Crown

030 Saltsea Chronicles

030 Warhammer Age Of Sigmar:
Realms Of Ruin

030 Granblue Fantasy: Relink

031 Ghostrunner 2

031 Phantom Blade Zero

031 Lords Of The Fallen

032 Cyberpunk 2077: Phantom
Liberty

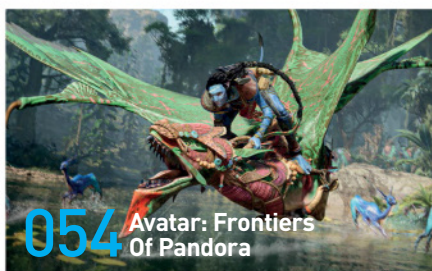
032 Still Wakes The Deep

034 The Crew Motorfest

034 Towers Of Aghasba

034 Resistor

044 Star Wars
Outlaws



035 Sand Land

036 Revenant Hill

036 Honkai: Star Rail

036 Kunitsu-Gami: Path Of The
Goddess

036 Warhammer 40,000: Space
Marine 2

037 Marathon

037 Neva

037 The Plucky Squire

038 Death Stranding 2

038 Firewall Ultra

038 Silent Hill 2 Remake

039 Tekken 8

040 Foamstars

043 Metal Gear Delta

043 World Of Horror

043 Hades II

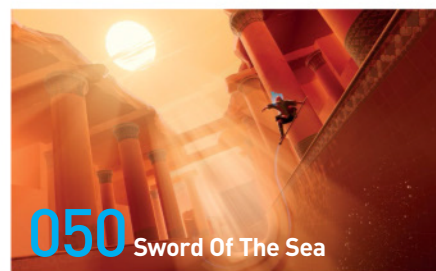
044 Star Wars Outlaws

048 Baldur's Gate 3

050 Dragon's Dogma 2

050 Sword Of The Sea

052 Mortal Kombat 1



053 Like A Dragon Gaiden: The Man
Who Erased His Name

054 Avatar: Frontiers Of Pandora

056 Armored Core VI Fires Of Rubicon

060 Assassin's Creed Mirage

062 Alan Wake 2

064 Final Fantasy VII Rebirth

068 Marvel's Spider-Man 2

Reviews

078 Final Fantasy XVI

084 Diablo IV

086 Synapse

088 Crime Boss: Rockay City

089 Crash Team Rumble

090 The Legend Of Heroes: Trails Into
Reverie

092 Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective

094 Dordogne

095 Oxenfree II: Lost Signals

096 F1 23

098 C-Smash VRS

099 Rogue Legacy 2

RetroStation

102 Classic game: Parasite Eve 2

104 Memory card: Silent Hill 3

105 Defend your hero: Vanille

106 The Feature: FPS gamechangers

112 Plus points: Ghostbusters:
The Video Game Remastered

113 A brief history of: OTS cameras

114 Parting shot



Insider

Getting you closer to PlayStation's most exciting stories, people, and culture



■ Persona 3 established the modern formula, and its melancholy, hip hop-tinged aesthetic is unforgettable. ■

INSIDER HIGHLIGHTS

10 CLOUDS FORM

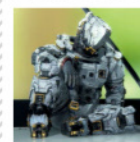
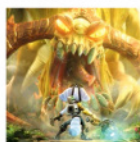
PS Plus' streaming gets an upgrade

11 NO OBJECTIONS

PS lawyering brought mostly up to date

12 THE CHILL 10

Which projects went AWOL from our Hot 50?



The Akademia is where you'll learn Archetypes and switch skills in the high-fantasy Metaphor.

Atlus make things Persona(l)

Can remakes, spin-offs, and spiritual successors hold the line until Persona 6?

Green paint, innocuous in the corner of Persona's 25th anniversary image, was enough to have fans frothing that it was a secret nod to Persona 6. Yet the celebrations throughout last year came and went with no other news about the long-awaited latest entry in the series (the fifth game, after all, was released on both PS3 and PS4 back in 2016). Will a high-profile remake, spinoff, and the revitalisation of a sister series keep the fires burning in the absence of a new mainline title?

Persona 3 Reload is the big remake, following on from the remaster of Persona 3 Portable earlier this year, while Persona 5 is getting another spinoff, this time a strategy RPG, Persona 5 Tactica. Meanwhile, Project Re Fantasy has resurfaced as Metaphor: ReFantazio, a more fantastical (surprise) twist on mechanics that still very much shares the Shin Megami Tensei and Persona DNA.

THREE SHOOTER

Persona 3, first released for PlayStation 2 in 2006, is a fan favourite for good reason – it established the modern Persona formula, and its melancholy, hip hop-tinged aesthetic is unforgettable. Yet

it's often the subject of some grumbling thanks to the fact no rerelease has ever collected all additional content together. 2007's Persona 3 FES added an epilogue story in the shape of The Answer, while Persona 3 Portable in 2009 added a divergent main story with a new female protagonist (and finally gave you the ability to control your other party members).

Annoyingly, Reload isn't here to settle the score, but to offer a fresh target for heated discussion. This gorgeous full remake will only be an adaptation of the base game, albeit with quality-of-life improvements intact. Brand-new content is also in the mix, such as fresh side-stories that are distinct from the already existing Social Link events, extra cutscenes and script tweaks, and some adjustments to central mega-dungeon

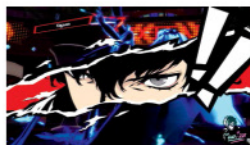
Will a major remake keep the fires burning in the absence of a new mainline title?

P3R's SEES squad members have had an incredible glow-up.



Tartarus (a tower hundreds of levels tall that forms the backbone of your monster mashing). But if you want The Answer or to play as the Female Protagonist – both of which provide some great additions to the overall story – you're out of luck (unless Atlus does as it did for the Shin Megami Tensei III remaster and simply makes them into DLC later on).

Still, Reload isn't something that's just being shoved out the door. As we mentioned earlier, it's been a long time since P5 was first released, meaning that even though P3R has been remade in a way that replicates the original style,



STREAM YOUR HEARTS

As Persona 5's many versions have been released, some fans have been annoyed at the heavily enforced restrictions on streaming the game. But no longer. As of last month, it's all allowed, with the humble request that spoilers be marked as such.

visually it's already a big improvement. The character models look gorgeous, as do the portraits, and menus are super-slick across battles and dungeon exploration (though we do miss the revolver-chamber-shaped battle menu – everything now has either a water or moon theme).

YOUR MOVE

Persona 5 Tactica, meanwhile, has a deliberately lo-fi aesthetic with chibi designs that keep things readable from a zoomed-out perspective. Sucked into a previously unencountered kind of Palace, the Phantom Thieves meet new character Elle and become caught up in a revolution to liberate the people of her realm.

The shift in perspective is owing to the larger-scale battles, with your party of three moving across large, grid-based maps (which feature the likes of cover and vertical terrain). Combat uses your demonic Personas to deal damage, with

returning elements like One More to combine multiple attacks, and even the option to team up for powerful Triple Threat attacks to heap on damage. Some story DLC has already been announced, teasing the return of a much-requested character – presumably Goro Akechi.

REGARDING FANTASY

But who'd have expected it would be something genuinely fresh that stole our hearts – Metaphor: ReFantazio? (Though, while it's distinct, it bears plenty of similarities to Shin Megami Tensei and Persona.) Fully set in a high fantasy world that's a "mirror" to our own, the story appears to centre on a battle for the throne in the royal capital of Granrad, as the country's current ruler has been under the grip of a curse for many years.

As the "traveller" you've ended up in the middle of this quest (perhaps coming from our own world). Joined by a little fairy

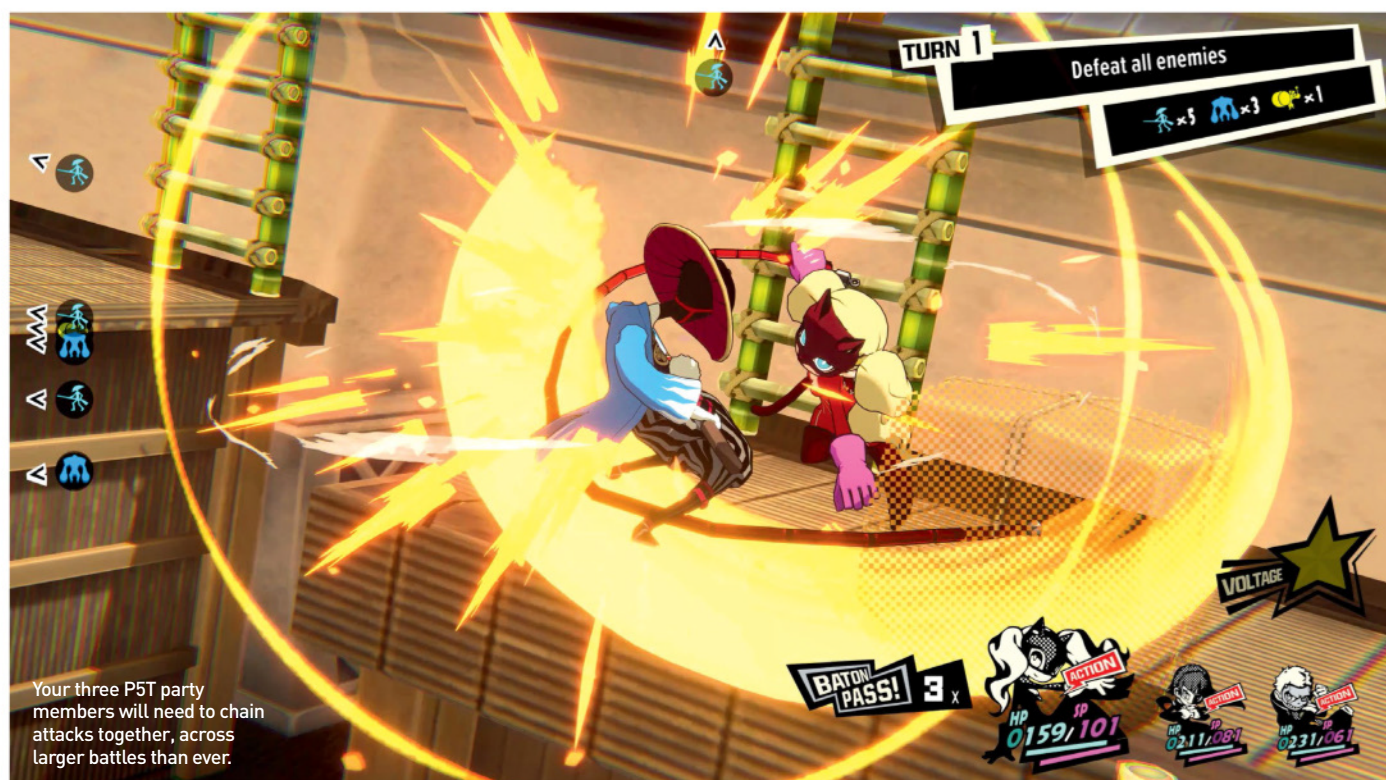
helper, your party will expand beyond humans alone, including Hulkenberg (an elf lady with a massive axe), and Heismay (a delightfully odd fruitbat thing). An Archetype class system, including the likes of Warriors, Seekers, Knights, and Thieves (similar to classic Final Fantasy's job systems), suggests a high degree of customisation across your squad.

Otherwise, a lot of the project's design seems to take cues from Persona 5, right down to the super-slick menus and battle commands. It even appears to have an advantage system like SMT's Press Turns, meaning you can overwhelm enemies to reduce their own ability to strike back. Calling upon Archetype skills is similar to using your Persona, team up attacks feature, and perhaps most interestingly **L3** allows you to retry a turn, empowering you to grapple with thinking strategically even if it doesn't work out.

While Persona 6 is a green-splattered dream at this point, sometimes it's what you weren't expecting to look forward to that can be most exciting – there are plenty of adventures to be had yet.

★ P5T is due later this year, with P3R and Metaphor: ReFantazio arriving in 2024.

Persona 5 Tactica has a deliberately lo-fi aesthetic with chibi designs that keep things readable when zoomed-out.



Your three P5T party members will need to chain attacks together, across larger battles than ever.



1 With powers awakened only by an 'evoker' to the head, P3R's dark themes are inescapable. **2** The Phantom Thieves you know and love have had a chibi overhaul. **3** Highly stylised (and a bit busy), Metaphor's effective menus are becoming an Atlus hallmark. **4** Gone are P3P's menu-maps. P3R will allow you to run around town once more. **5** The green paint that started the Persona 6 rumours was in the 25th Anniversary artwork.





JOIN THE Q

A push for cloud gaming feels long overdue for PlayStation. And yet the upcoming Project Q streaming device was only announced to be able to Remote Play from your own PS5, and not the cloud. Could this be set to change? We hope so.



Wood ya believe it?

Dashiell Wood's hot gossip

Some people have been worried by the rapid expansion of **Embracer Group**, a Swedish holding company that dominated headlines with its acquisitions over the last three years, and now it seems their fears were well-founded. In an open letter, CEO **Lars Wingefors** has announced a company-wide restructuring program that "targets cost savings". As **Embracer** is the owner of many popular IPs (including **Tomb Raider**, **Borderlands**, and **Deus Ex**), this announcement suggests we could see fan-favourite studios and projects canned in the following months. The dire outlook comes as the result of a huge \$2 billion partnership deal that fell through, although a string of high-profile flops including the recent **Saints Row** reboot probably didn't help. This is another reminder that too much consolidation can ultimately harm consumers no matter who's doing it (even you, Uncy Sony). With so many properties in the hands of a single owner, moves like this could destroy some of our favourite series.

Getting cloudy

With a chance of gaming – PS Plus' PS5 streaming is beginning to roll out

Gamers staring down their internet connection.



Streaming has been part of PlayStation's online offerings since PS Now (the game catalogue that's now part of PS Plus Premium and Extra). However, originally it was a bandage solution to the PS3 back catalogue problem – as later consoles were unable to run games designed for that system's complicated hardware, streaming was the only way they could be played. But now PlayStation is looking to make streaming a feature.

Designed to rival competing services like xCloud and Google Stadia (no longer a rival; RIP), PlayStation's new cloud streaming doesn't have a fancy name, but it does have the capability. Subscribers to the PS Plus Premium tier and higher will be able to stream supported PS5 games from their library, as well as the PS Plus Catalogue and Game Trials. It's especially handy when browsing a big list of games you've been given access to as part of your sub, as you can jump in and check one out without having to wait around to download it, only to find you don't really want to play it at all.

THUNDER RUMBLE


While some games have been streamable before now, the options have been limited to PS4 and PS3 games (and for the latter, as we mentioned, streaming is mandatory). At the time of writing, though, the feature is still in the trial period, meaning you may be lucky enough to give it a go before its full rollout, with the plan being to steadily add

more supported games as the service continues to grow.

Cloud streaming might not be for everyone – it requires both fast internet speeds and the patience not to get irritated at small amounts of lag as you play. But it's become a key battleground for businesses competing in the games sector. Within the UK, cloud streaming was cited by the CMA (Competition and Markets Authority) as one of the reasons it sought to block Microsoft's purchase of Activision, citing growth in game streaming in the country over the last few years as a reason why no single company could be allowed to monopolise cloud-streaming huge IPs.

After all, get it right, and you won't have to persuade players to pay for a console just to play a few matches of Call Of Duty with their friends. Though for PS5, so far, the impressive hardware has felt like a vital part of the package – it's not just what you play that matters, it's what you play it on. Will streaming move that needle, or just be a nice bonus for subscribers?

★ PS Plus' PS5 cloud streaming service is set to roll out in the near future.



With this new collection, the slick anime-inspired visuals of the latest entries have never looked better.

Court is back in session

Three Apollo Justice courtroom dramas coming to PS4

Get your pointing finger ready. Almost four years after the release of the *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney Trilogy*, which saw the first three entries in the long-running legal visual novel series land on PlayStation, Capcom is bringing the final mainline titles to current platforms.

Unveiled as part of this year's Capcom Showcase, *Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney Trilogy* combines entries 4 to 6 (*Apollo*

Justice: Ace Attorney, *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney – Dual Destinies*, and *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney – Spirit Of Justice*) into one package. As the title suggests, they retain the investigative and courtroom gameplay while the focus shifts from original protagonist Phoenix Wright to his protégé Apollo Justice.

TAKE THAT!

Just as the previous trilogy received a substantial overhaul, this collection has

benefitted from some noticeable graphical improvements. For starters, the oldest entry (*Apollo Justice*) now boasts improved 2D sprite work, while the more advanced 3D graphics of the latest two titles (*Dual Destinies* and *Spirit Of Justice*) have been enhanced with a higher resolution and improved anti-aliasing. This comes in addition to a streamlined UI that, while nothing particularly exciting, should help all three titles feel a little more cohesive and modern. So, with the entire mainline series set to be playable on modern hardware, maybe it's finally time we hear a little more news about that upcoming seventh entry, *Capcom?*

■ The focus shifts from original protagonist Phoenix Wright to his protégé Apollo Justice. ■

★ No objections here: *Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney Trilogy* launches early in 2024.



The Chill 10

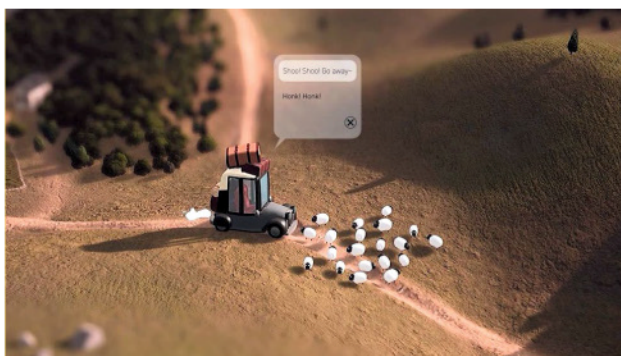
Not every game can be as fiery as the ones in our Hot 50 (p23). Here are ten games that once felt like a lock, and have since returned to the void. We pray for their return.



01

THE LAST OF US FACTIONS

Recognise this image? You should, as it's all we've seen of this multiplayer spinoff. Building off the original TLOU's fan-favourite mode, it aims to tell an original story. Bloomberg has reported devs have been moved off the project, while Naughty Dog says it needs "more time".



02

LITTLE DEVIL INSIDE

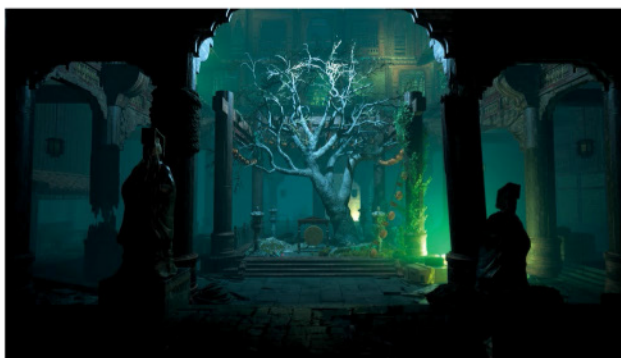
One of the earliest PS5 games that we became attached to, its striking diorama-like style and big monsters looked the part. Yet what the game actually was never seemed to materialise beyond very slight demos. Once set for Winter 2022, where the devil is this one?



03

THE WOLF AMONG US 2

The striking teaser for this revival in 2019 (and subsequent 2022 trailer) felt like a statement of intent from the resurrected Telltale – it was back. But The Expanse turned out to be the priority. Bigsby's return is still due in 2024, so no crying wolf here, but we want to see more!



04

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES 2

One day there will be a drama-filled tell-all about just what happened here. Writers let go, the whole dev team booted off, and the replacement studio's name kept quiet – even recent teases can't lower some blood-red flags.



05

SKULL & BONES

The most pirate-cursed game on this list. It started development in 2013 as a spinoff from Assassin's Creed 4: Black Flag, and was playable at E3 2018 and set for launch soon after, before being delayed year after year. With a beta set for August, it might finally be sink-or-swim time.



06

CRIMSON DESERT

This single-player RPG from the team behind the Black Desert MMORPG was announced with a trailer featuring lush environments and exciting combat. Pearl Abyss never said it'd be a quick project to make, but it'd be great to get an update soon to quench our Saharan thirst.



07

SUICIDE SQUAD: KILL THE JUSTICE LEAGUE

With the release date imminent, this sequel to the Batman: Arkham games was hit with a months-long delay following grumbling online about the live-service, gear-based structure. Can the developers use the time to refocus things and bring it back guns blazing?



08

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC (REMAKE)

Things don't look great for Embracer (see p10), which has had an effect on projects like this ambitious KOTOR remake. CEO Lars Wingefors seemed exasperated when asked for an update in an investor call: "No further comments."



09

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME (REMAKE)

The original remains a fan favourite, meaning Ubisoft probably took the negative response to the rough-looking reveal hard. Delays followed, including moving internal studios. The latest update: "We're in conception right now."



10

PRAGMATA

Capcom's mysterious game about an astronaut protecting a young girl intrigued when revealed in 2020. Announced for 2022, it was pushed back to 2023, and now indefinitely (each time with a cute apology note from the child). What little we've seen still has us hooked, though.



STAR POWER

The retro-styled Penny isn't the only throwback on its way. Square Enix has announced *Star Ocean: The Second Story R*. This HD-2D remake is far from simple, with pixel art sprites to get up close to within fully 3D environments.

PlayStation voices

The month in mouthing off

"THESE COMPANIES WANT FIVE-YEAR DEV CYCLES BUT THEY REFUSE TO CREATE A WORKING ENVIRONMENT WHERE PEOPLE CAN SEE THEMSELVES ACTUALLY WANTING TO STICK WITH THEM FOR THREE YEARS, LET ALONE FIVE."

FAILBETTER'S BRUNO DIAS MAKES A GOOD POINT.

"[SADAKO] MADE AN APPEARANCE IN THIS GAME, SO THAT WAS GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME."

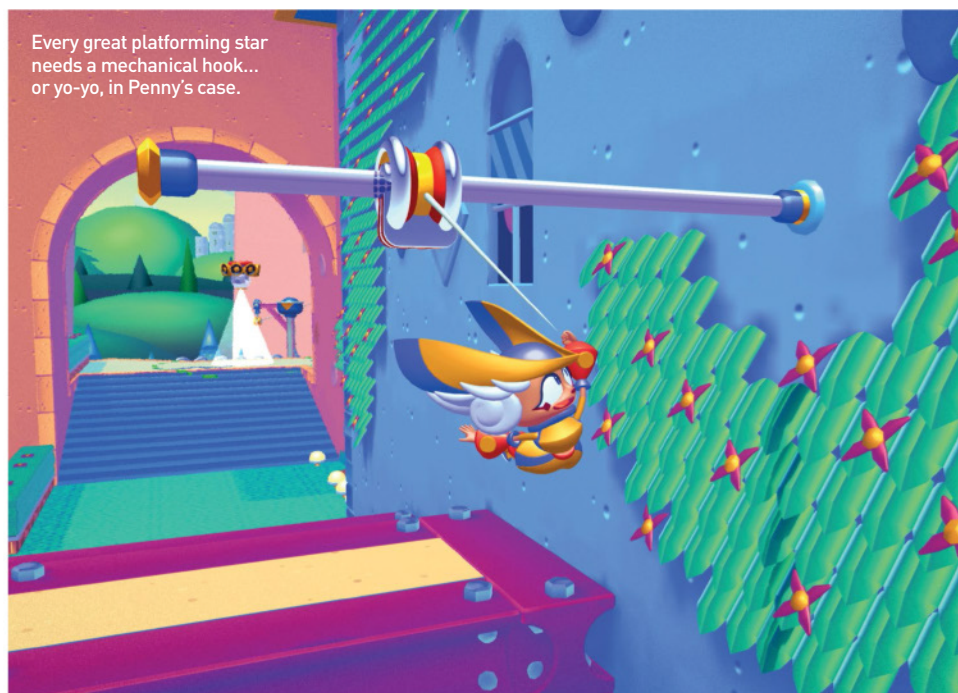
THE RING FAN (AND ICONIC ACTOR) NICOLAS CAGE'S REASON FOR EMBRACING HIS DEAD BY DAYLIGHT ROLE.



"I RECOMMENDED GYO, KAMEN RIDER, AND DEVIL MAN TO HIM. HE BOUGHT THEM ALL." HIDEO KOJIMA INTRODUCED DIRECTOR NICOLAS WINDING REFN TO MANGA CLASSICS.

Yo, yo-yoer

The Sonic Mania devs spin up something new with the lo-fi Penny's Big Breakaway



Every great platforming star needs a mechanical hook... or yo-yo, in Penny's case.

Sonic Superstars might not be the Sonic Mania 2 fans were clamouring for (get our hands-on opinion over on p29), but don't count the developers of that retro-styled favourite out just yet. They're doing their own thing under the banner of Evening Star. Penny's Big Breakaway is the studio's first original title, coming in 2024.

When hero Penny tries to show off her yo-yo skills to impress the royal court, it goes awry, resulting in the king being stripped down to his underwear. With that, the penguins are released to hunt her down for her crimes. Cue having to use your yo-yo skills to swing and twirl your way through 12 colourful 3D levels.

NEXT DIMENSION

That's right, this platformer is in *full 3D*. Just as the studio previously developed the Retro Engine that powered Sonic Mania, its new Star Engine fuels Penny's Big Breakaway. While they're different sets of tools, the two engines do have some strengths in common, in that both are designed to empower slick action that puts the 'character' into 'character platformer'.

Sonic needs to feel responsive in players' hands for his games to work, and the same goes for Penny – even with the extra dimension. Even so, as well as areas where you'll have full control of the camera, it looks like the

camera will, at times, dynamically move to show Penny jumping around from a side-on angle. It's reminiscent of the way some Sonic games made on the Hedgehog Engine mix 3D and 2D styles, though they never managed to look quite as slick as this. Momentum plays a part in Penny's movement, just as it does with a certain Blue Blur – and it will be key to mastering Time Attack challenges.

To keep the action flowing, the stages Penny makes her way through have solid, blocky colours and simple geometry. The style's expressive while also ensuring the action is readable, vital in the genre. In addition, her sentient yo-yo Yo-You will be able to gobble up treats to power up and unlock abilities, from turning into a one-wheeled motorbike to spinning overhead to launch Penny like a helicopter. While we carry a torch for classic platforming favourites, it's important to leave room for new ones too.

★ What do you think of Penny's platforming? Tell us: play@futurenet.com

Illustrator Rei Wataru returns as character designer, with writer Kinoko Nasu taking on a purely supervisory role this time.

Can't fight the moonlight

Play Master and Servant in Fate/Samurai Remnant

Nasverse fans are being spoiled. While developer Type-Moon's 2004 visual novel *Fate/Stay Night* was never officially released in English, many of its wildly varied spinoffs have been, to a clamouring reception from an eager fanbase. *Fate/Samurai Remnant*, which reimagines the Holy Grail War as a *Dynasty Warriors*-style hack-and-slash, will be the latest of these on 29 September.

In Keian-era Japan, humans summon heroic spirits known as Servants in the hope of claiming the wish-granting Waxing Moon Vessel for themselves. Seven human/Servant pairings are facing off; you play as swordsman Miyamoto Iori and his Servant, known pseudonymously as Saber. You'll both issue orders to Saber, and occasionally take full control of them to cut through waves of enemies with supercharged magical attacks. Master Iori is no slouch himself, being

proficient in the Niten Ichi-ryu style of swordplay and fully capable of taking the lead as Master and Servant fight as one in combat. You'll need all of these tricks up your sleeve as other Servants – recognisable, fan-favourite faces among them – are far from pushovers.

Beyond hacking and slashing through hordes (the game's being developed by Omega Force, after all), and dynamic confrontations with Servants, there's a greater focus on exploration. The town of Edo takes centre stage, lined with period-appropriate terraced houses that sequester brothels as well as the homes of samurai, plus plenty more to uncover.

Humans summon heroic spirits known as Servants in the hope of claiming the wish-granting Waxing Moon Vessel.

★ Save Edo from a fiery fate? You can try on both PS5 and PS4 later this year.

IN
THE
MOOD
FOR...



Deliveries

Dispatching just what you ordered, straight into your waiting eyes

1 LIKE A DRAGON: ISHIN!

Samurai Sakamoto Ryoma isn't just a voice for the disenfranchised, he's in peak physical condition – which is all that's needed in order for him to take up the job of a walking courier. As you're delivering letters against the clock, you're really a running courier throwing paper in the direction of recipients.

2 KENTUCKY ROUTE ZERO

With everything that happens in KRZ, it's easy to forget that it's the story of a journey to make one final antiques delivery, even if that means pawning your bones or entering offices filled with grizzly bears. You'll go below earth and ride a giant eagle, definitely more effort than most couriers go through.

3 LAKE

If postapocalyptic deliveries aren't your speed, try this narrative game in which the main character decides to become postperson for a rural community. There's no need to rush, and that's what makes it so great.

4 HITMAN 3

Agent 47's taken on many a job, so why not that of takeaway delivery driver? In The Wurst Delivery, he does just that, donning a cap to serve the unhealthiest meal of all time. It almost puts us off ordering 2am kebabs.

5 NIER: REPLICANT

As a JRPG originally from the 2010s, Nier: Replicant is chock-full of fetch quests, but there are also actual deliveries. In the Fragile Deliveries side-quests, all you have to do is to transport something and ensure it arrives in one piece by not running into monsters or throwing yourself off tall cliffs in search of a shortcut.

6 MONSTER HUNTER RISE

Already subjected to your violence, monsters draw the line at you kidnapping babies and attack you if you waddle past them carrying an egg. As eggs are wont to do, they break if you don't handle them with care. Egg deliveries can thus require just as heroic an effort as taking down a monster.

7 DEATH STRANDING

In the delivery game to end them all, you're not always transporting supplies that can make the difference between life or death – even in the postapocalypse, sometimes all people want is a pizza. Specifically, several kilos of pizza, to arrive hot within 60 minutes. That's the future of technology we need.

8 FINAL FANTASY XIV

Delivery moogles are a Final Fantasy staple, but none are as demanding as the Deputy Postmoogles in FFXIV. Each quest starts with a letter delivery, but before you know it, you're hard at work solving other people's problems, such as helping two weavers decide who's suitable to... polish their captain's blade.

9 BORDERLANDS 3

A series that makes fun of capitalism as consistently as Borderlands can't do without a burger delivery quest. You're asked to drive for Beau's Dynasty Burgers, and if you shoot the signs of competing burger chains while Beau is screaming at you to hurry up, it's a job extra-well done.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

Cloudpunk

This cyberpunk mail delivery game's golden rule? Never ask what's in the package. You don't need to – the recipients tell you quite often.

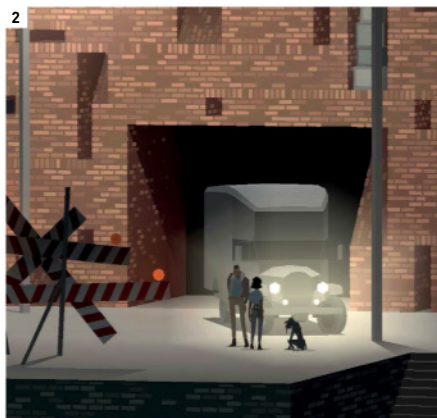
Assassin's Creed Valhalla

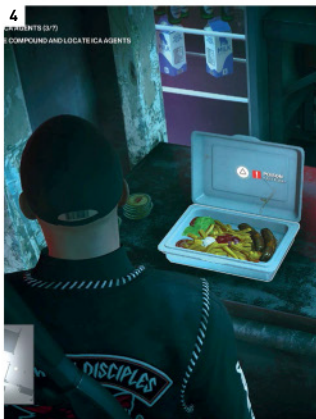
Eivor needs to deliver a love letter, but you don't know what the recipient looks like and could destroy young love forever. No pressure!

Genshin Impact

Kujo Kamaji isn't just a clan leader, he's also a dreamboat who asks you to deliver self-made snacks to his crush. Who could refuse to do that?

Did we fail to deliver your favourite? Got an In The Mood For idea? Show and tell at twitter.com/PLAYgamingmag





OPINION

"F2P GAMES CAN BE FUN TO PLAY, OR MONEYGRABBERS. APEX LEGENDS IS BOTH!"

Respawn's money vacuum embodies both best and worst F2P practice



WRITER BIO

While he loves free stuff, Luke Kemp knows the difference between price and value. Only one made him cry in *Life Is Strange*.

Before I begin the rant proper, I need to make it clear that I *love* Apex Legends. I've played many battle royales, but this is one of only two (the other being Hyper Scape; RIP) that managed to keep my attention, to the point where I was even prepared to spend some money on it. I have little to show for my investment, though.

It may seem unfair for me to single out Apex Legends for the free-to-play conversation. I'm holding Apex's proverbial feet to the fire because it has an in-game economy that's easy to understand, I'm extremely familiar with it... and some of the demands for money have a direct effect on the PvP experience. Moment-to-moment gameplay is brilliant, better than many free-to-play efforts, with fantastic controls and great map design. Moneygrabbing efforts are more cynical here than in many other games, however.

It's not a pay-to-win system. Well, maybe it *is*. This depends very much on you, and it's impossible to know whether this is the case or not until you've spent the money. What I'm referring to is the fact that of the 23 Legends (at time of writing), only six are actually free. The reason this is an issue is that the differences between the characters

go far beyond cosmetics. Each and every Legend has a unique passive ability, active ability, and ultimate ability. These, of course, have a direct impact on what you can and can't do – and, remember, you're playing against other people, not against AI. There are advantages against human opponents to be had.

MACRO TRANSACTIONS

As with every other free-to-play game, attempts are made to camouflage costs (and place consumer rights in the grey space of virtual transactions) by forcing the player to buy digital pretend money, and then getting them to spend *this* on in-game items. I'm going to bypass this by talking about costs in real terms (oh, and prices are due to be "adjusted" by the time you read this, so things might be even more expensive by now). Bear in mind, also, that there's no option to trial a Legend.

If you play Apex Legends for the first time today, and you want access to all 17 locked Legends, this will cost you a total of £92 (with a little bit of pretend money left over). That won't include any extra skins, emotes, weapon charms, or whatever. You *can* grind the characters out for free, but by the time you've bagged your 17th Legend, your account will have reached level 340. This will take hundreds of hours.

Nabbing one Legend at a time will cost you either £8 (£12 can get you two), or 20 account levels a pop. *Eight quid for one character*; a character you've never played as, at that. I *know* free-to-play games need to be funded, and I believe in paying into any free game that I enjoy for a significant amount of time. I've done precisely that here, and actually plan to again soon. But Apex Legends is infested with hundreds of tempting things to spend money on, a constantly updating catalogue of super-expensive cosmetics. Hiding the majority of the playable characters behind a paywall, especially at *those* prices, is impossible to justify in this environment.



Wraith here, leaping out of a portal to revive you (or quite possibly simply to steal your wallet).

Of the 23 Legends (at time of writing), only six are actually free.

It's **everyone's** turn to play



Nobody likes being left out.

That's why we're levelling the video gaming playing field for people with physical disabilities. We find out what they want to play, then create custom controller setups to get them back in the game. Find out how our charity is transforming lives and bringing families and friends closer together.

Discover and donate at
www.specialeffect.org.uk



The Gamers Charity Reg Charity no 1121004

OPINION

“WANTING AN EVEN PLAYING FIELD IN YOUR ONLINE LOBBIES ISN'T A SKILL ISSUE.”

Good matchmaking improves first-person shooters for most players



WRITER BIO

With 300 hours in MWII, Dashiell Wood knows better than anyone that it's time to stop moaning about skill-based matchmaking.

Chances are, if you keep up with the online chatter surrounding popular first-person shooters, you're already well-versed in the seemingly endless squabble about skill-based matchmaking. An algorithm that groups players of a similar skill level together for more balanced matches, a game delivering a fairer experience for everyone shouldn't be a controversial topic. Yet this is easily the one feature that big content creators and angry forum users seem to complain about the most.

To those outside the FPS bubble, it might seem like a strange thing to be upset about, especially when you consider that skill-based matchmaking (or 'SBMM' for us FPS-heads) is an excellent idea on paper. Getting home late from a long day at work, the last thing you would want to do is sit down for a relaxing round of Modern Warfare II only to be dropped into an unrelenting meat-grinder of a lobby where you're repeatedly eviscerated by the same one or two sweaty teens hopped-up on Monster Energy and an aversion to the outside world. If you only have a few hours spare to play whichever shooter you favour each week, facing off against players with a similar level of practice is a good way to

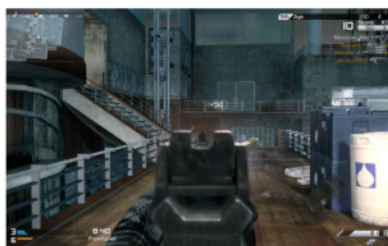
ensure that you're all going to have the most enjoyable possible experience.

When the biggest Triple-A shooter series, the likes Battlefield and Call Of Duty, live and die by their huge casual audiences – a vast swathe of users who would quietly move on to other things if the experience was to become too frustrating – SBMM is a necessary part of maintaining a healthy playerbase. It's not just a feature that exists wholly in service of the casual players, however, as more hardcore ones also benefit from more rigorous competition. Getting a 50:1 kill/death ratio in every match might feel like a refreshing power trip for the first few hours, especially when you're just trying to plough your way through the latest battle pass, but easy win after easy win without any real incentive to invest the time required to hone your skills is a sure-fire recipe for boredom.

HIGHLIGHT REEL

It's no coincidence that the system's most vocal detractors are almost invariably content creators – or legions of their devoted fans who uncritically regurgitate the same views. Their primary argument is that there's something inherently unfair about grouping skilled players in matches with other skilled players, but this is quite clearly completely ridiculous. If you went to support your local footie team only to see them battered in a 30-nil loss against Real Madrid, you would probably have some choice words to say about the fairness of the match.

Without something to ensure a reasonably level playing field, YouTubers, streamers, and TikTok reel makers would thrive on an endless supply of flashy gameplay clips, something that becomes incredibly easy to create when you're playing against people who have only just installed the game. There's a clear profit motive to make things as unfair as possible here and, while the removal of SBMM would certainly make the lives of this small minority easier, it's an incredibly short-sighted mission.



SBMM isn't a particularly recent invention. Call Of Duty, for example, has had it for years.

■ A fairer experience for everyone shouldn't be controversial. ■

Advertisement

Car, home and travel insurance plus broadband,
breakdown cover and more. Get more info or
compare quotes, for over 40 products, at [go.compare](https://www.go.compare)



**WE'VE GOT
THE OPTIONS.
YOU MAKE THE
CHOICE.**

GO.
COMPARE

Curse of the SEARRATS

with
2-4
Player
Couch
Co-Op

A hand-animated 'ratoidvania' adventure!



Team up and take down
diabolical bosses!



Explore stormy beaches,
rugged cliffs, ancient forests,
and crumbling tombs.



Collect spiritual energy
and visit Wu Yun
to improve your skills.

Coming Early 2023.

PS4 PS5

XBOX ONE XBOX SERIES S STEAM NINTENDO SWITCH

Visit www.pqube.co.uk/curse-of-the-sea-rats/
to find out more!

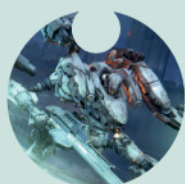


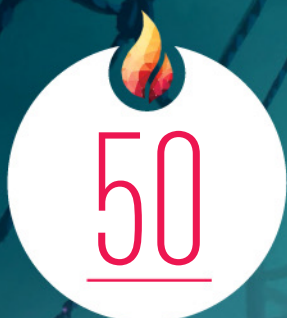
THE HOT

50

50-01

PlayStation's next wave of hits is on the way, from blockbuster sequels to the brand-new – these are the 50 hottest games you need to look out for, coming to your PS5 and PS4!





SHADOW GAMBIT: THE CURSED CREW

Has us hooked

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** 17 AUG / **PUB** MIMIMI GAMES
DEV MIMIMI GAMES / **PLAYERS** 1

With a sharp sabre sticking out of the centre of her chest, it doesn't take much imagination to picture how protagonist Afia Manicato left the land of the living. Being undead might hinder your ability to blend in at the local tavern, but it is, it turns out, otherwise a real blessing for a sneaky pirate thief.

You may know Mimimi Games for coining the stealth strategy genre with the (rather good) *Shadow Tactics* and *Desperados III*. *Shadow Gambit* is a fresh take on it, with a standalone, original story, while evolving everything we loved about the often-devious sneakers that came before. The isometric presentation and focus on co-ordinating multiple playable characters will all feel familiar to

returning players and, after going hands-on for the duration of the first act, we're already confident that this is going to build on these strong foundations in the best ways.

PIRATE BOO-TY

Shadow Gambit is distinguished by its supernatural setting. Mimimi has ditched the more grounded locales of feudal Japan and the Wild West in favour of a vast, alternate-history Caribbean, where the unique focus on magic isn't just for colour, it introduces a host of exciting tactical possibilities. Your main goal is, of course, to get your hands on some long-lost buried treasure, but an army of fanatical inquisitors stands in your way. Vying to purge all

supernatural forces from the Caribbean, the Inquisition has a huge numerical advantage over your crew. This is where Afia's spectral special abilities come in, to help even the odds. With a quick tap she can twist her own ghoulish sword wound to her own ends, drawing the blade to launch a lightning-fast teleport attack (perfect for escaping a sticky situation or getting the jump on a hard to reach guard). For a quieter approach, her time manipulation



The colourful visuals help convey an appropriately tropical vibe and keep the overall tone lighthearted.

Afia's adept at running her ship, even if she does only have a skeleton crew to command.

powers can freeze patrolling soldiers to enable you to sneak through their field of vision undetected.

Afia is soon joined on her quest by other cursed pirates, with each successive addition bringing their own substantial special abilities to the table. The complexity ramps up as you unlock the ship's doctor Suleidy, who can generate impromptu cover by sprouting bushes from the ground, and the ninja chef Toyo, capable of beaming

back to locations he's marked with a paper charm. The intuitive controls and option to queue up co-ordinated actions keep things from ever seeming too overwhelming and, with more characters to come over the course of the story, we're excited to see what other game-changing additions are in store.

GHOST SHIP

Early on you are also introduced to your base of operations, a sentient

ghost ship called the Red Marley. It sounds clichéd, but this haunted boat is as much a character as its crew members. This

is true in the most literal sense as, speaking through a gigantic green skull, the Red Marley is not only central to the narrative but, like the rest of the crew, has useful magical powers of its own. The ship can save a quick snapshot of the world, which you can then return to at a moment's notice. Accompanied by a snazzy animation, it's more of a jazzed-up quick save than anything, but it's one that always feels quick and responsive. Considering the scale of the maps (which you return to over multiple missions, and contain complex multi-stage objectives that range from hovering up magical loot to taking out key Inquisition targets), being able to freely experiment with your approach without the fear of any serious repercussions is a blessing.



Pinocchio gets violent

back off mid-fight to use your in-arm gears to sharpen them back up. On top of that, enemy attacks are, currently, perhaps a smidge too gametised to our Chalamet-lookalike-hero. Further customisation of his puppet innards could end up setting *Lies Of P* apart, but for now we wonder whether this will be doomed to be a puppet-like Bloodborne imitation, or an industrial revolution worth fighting through on its own merits.



Who ya gonna call?



Fall Guys + Crash Team Racing = gloriously good fun



There's more than creepy crawlies to worry about, though the beasties of this world will nibble you if you're not careful. The bigger enemies are much nastier.



ALONE IN THE DARK

Fear and delight, all the way through the night

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** 25 OCT / **PUB** THQ NORDIC
DEV PIECES INTERACTIVE / **PLAYERS** 1

This survival horror titan has been grasping for a way back into the light for decades, and being remade again you follow PI Edward Carnby and Emily Hartwood as the pair investigate the disappearance of Emily's uncle Jeremy from Derceto, his mansion. Famous faces now portray these two leads, but that's far from the only fresh lick of paint around here.

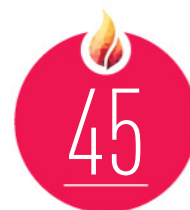
First, let's talk about the headliners: Jodie Comer of Killing Eve fame portrays Emily, a woman attempting to demystify the so-called Hartwood curse, and Stranger Things' David Harbour takes on the role of her investigative partner Edward Carnby. The story shifts subtly depending on which of the two you choose to play as, with supporting characters even reacting differently to each.

A playable prologue is already available on PS5, following a young girl called Grace Saunders (who fans will know was deuteragonist in Alone In The

Dark 2, and the lead character in a short game released to promote it) as she attempts to post the very letter that calls the two leads to Derceto. Even as something strange scratches at the walls and the space itself warps in impossible ways, Grace never gives into her fear. In fact, the worst thing about the demo is the dreadful sense that Grace doesn't realise just how much danger she's in.

While Grace can only avoid the toothiest of horrors by cannily navigating the space in the demo, combat features in the full game. Bullets are scarce and you've got to make your shots count, though when something frightful gets just a wee bit close, you can come out swinging with melee combat. There's something oddly satisfying about hurling an axe into the flesh of a shambling terror.

Puzzles punctuate the action too, with exploration also a key focus. Doom jazz percolating throughout the musical score ensures you can be sure to experience simmering tension in even these quieter moments.



LIKE A DRAGON: INFINITE WEALTH

Making moolah and maybe mischief

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** EARLY 2024 / **PUB** SEGA
DEV RYU GA GOTOKU STUDIO / **PLAYERS** 1

Poor old Ichiban Kasuga – he's woken up in some dives that'd leave anyone feeling less than number one. This sequel sees the hard-done-by gangster waking up naked and afraid once more, though this time it's on the beach of an as-yet-unnamed foreign country (though almost certainly Hawaii). As beachgoers flee, Ichi is left only more confused.

But this eighth Like A Dragon (formerly Yakuza) isn't just an Ichiban beach episode.

The other half of this picture lies with a second playable protagonist, Kiryu Kazuma. We suspect spin-off Like A Dragon Gaiden: The Man Who Erased His Name will go more into the particulars, but the series' premier protagonist has had to go undercover to protect those he loves – and apparently this time that requires a dodgy K-pop boy band member haircut.

We're not likely to learn too much more about how that happens before the aforementioned side-story is released, but we've already seen Ichiban and Kiryu chatting. In a scene that raises many questions and offers few answers, Ichiban displays a surprisingly mature side as he requests Kiryu's help. The conversation also reveals that Kiryu is already friendly with hostess bar manager Saeko, a feisty party member from the

last turn-based title, who's currently furious with Ichiban.

It turns out that Ichi had

only gone and proposed to his adventuring bud, and Saeko turned him down firmly. As you may expect, this has opened up a rift among the party of the last game, which is perhaps why Ichiban is partnering up with Kiryu this time. Ichi says he's tried to apologise, but it just isn't cutting it, turning to Kiryu for advice, who in turn hints he may be able to speak from experience.

"BEACHGOERS FLEE, DECRYING ICHIBAN AS A STREAKER."



Ichiban and Kiryu's first meeting was fleeting but the two will team up for real in Infinite Wealth, though each with their own turn-based RPG party.

44

CLASSIFIED: FRANCE '44

A sneaking mission

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** 2023 / **PUB** TEAM 17
DEV ABSOLUTELY GAMES / **PLAYERS** 1

Looking to liberate an ally of the resistance, our special ops squad darts between cover towards the ruined cabin in which he's being held. In this turn-based tactics take on WW2, each of our units has their own weapons and abilities. With the fog of war clearing, we activate a unit's overwatch power to ready a shot at any Nazi who walks by. On their turn, they do, and a pop-up asks us to confirm if we want to take a shot. We choose 'no'. The time isn't right to go loud. That kind of choice is why *Classified* is shaping up to be one of our favourites in the genre.

Operating behind enemy lines, taking enemies by surprise where you can is vital lest you be outgunned. Stealth kills allow you to quietly thin enemy forces during missions, striking quickly before reinforcements can be called in. Get spotted, and rather than transitioning the state of the whole battle into one of full awareness, Nazis will only be able to work with the information they have.

It's all part of an effort to make a game that feels inspired by reality while still offering players the opportunity to make satisfying choices. That also plays into the

cover system. While hiding behind soft cover like bushes gives you a decent chance of evading flying bullets, taking fire in any sort of cover risks breaking your will (and enemies face the same risk), costing a precious turn if the gunfire rattles your team member. It'll take some scare tactics of your own to prepare for D-Day, the clock ticking down as you vie to sow chaos across the mission map.

Expect plenty of peril, though your core squad members all have stories to tell, so don't expect permadeath – just injury.

43

HELLDIVERS 2

For Super-Earth!

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** 2023 / **PUB** SONY
DEV ARROWHEAD GAME STUDIOS AB / **PLAYERS** 1-4

Once a co-operative, top-down twin-stick shooter, this indie favourite returns with backing from PlayStation. You're still blasting away space critters, *Starship Troopers*-style, but those bugs are now far gnarlier, and you're staring them down from an over-the-shoulder perspective.

The series' tongue-in-cheek framing of militaristic propaganda returns, as does always-on friendly

fire. Team synergy has never been so important!

Besides boots-on-the-ground action, you can also call in air strikes. Just make sure you're a way beyond the blast radius before you point and shoot. Your teammates would probably also appreciate a heads-up before you eagle-drop a 500kg bomb on them or litter the battlefield with anti-personnel mines, but hey! – you do you.



Think the marines in *Aliens* or *Starship Troopers* have it rough? Well, get ready for the worst pest control job in the system – and watch out for your pals too.

42

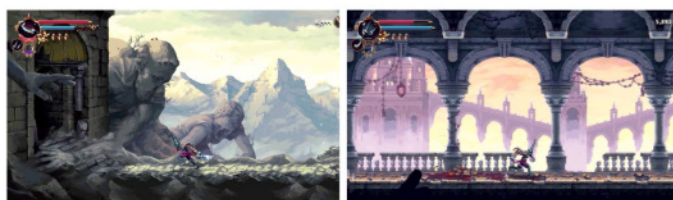
BLASPHEMOUS 2

Amen to that

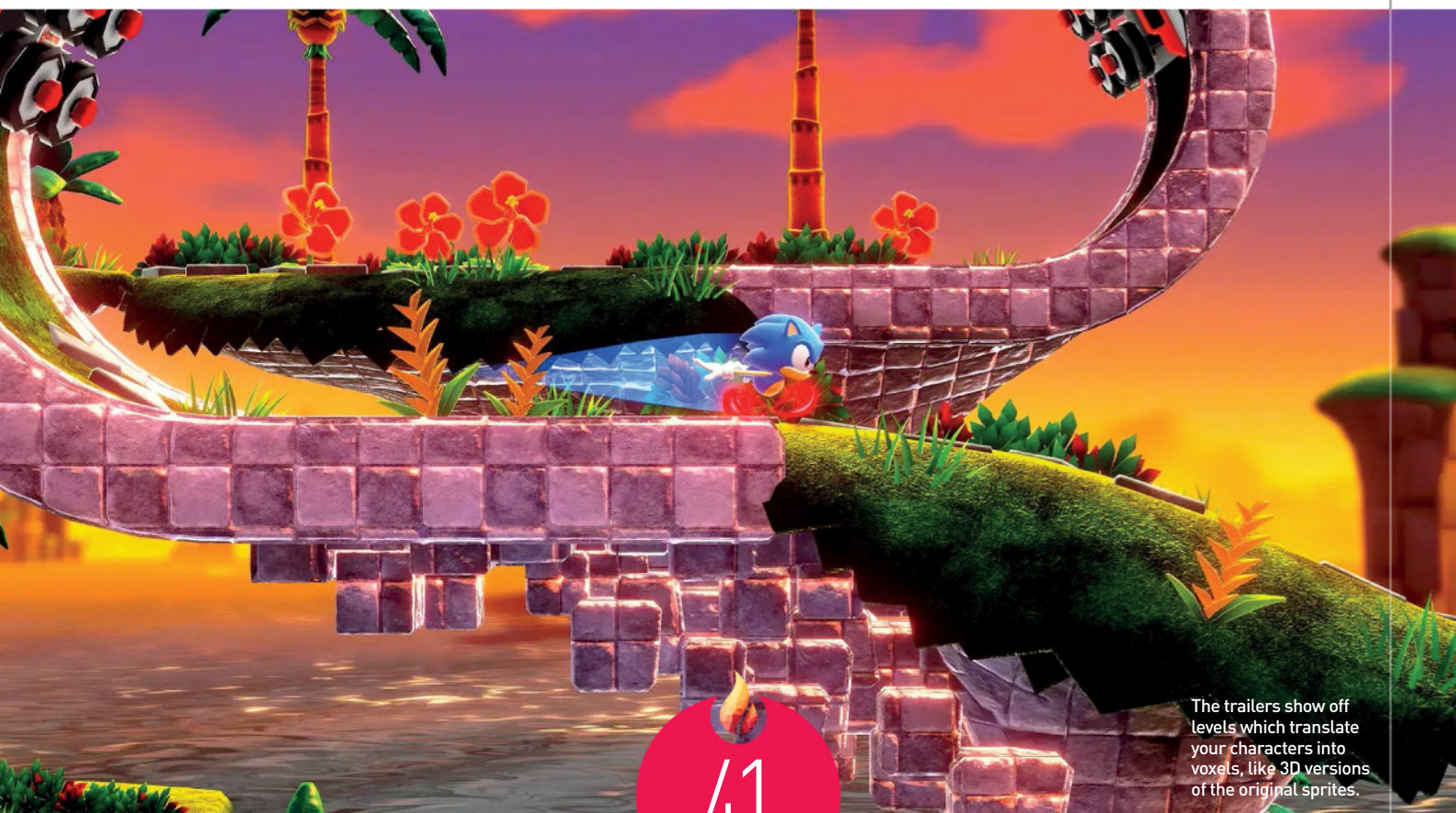
FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** 24 AUG / **PUB** TEAM17
DEV THE GAME KITCHEN / **PLAYERS** 1

Don your favourite cone-shaped helmet, because you won't want to miss this sinfully stylish sequel. Dumped into the unenviable position of a knight forced to venture through a world of enemy-infested Gothic structures, the striking art blends mediaeval fantasy with religious elements to deliver beautiful vistas and fearsome foes in equal measure. It's not just a looker, either, as the intelligently

designed exploration elevates its more conventional metroidvania mechanics by tying your ability to enter certain areas to your choice of starting weapon. Although things open up later, this makes for an interesting first few hours with plenty of room for replayability down the line. The grim world is complemented by challenging combat, and the whole package is dripping with *Dark Souls* charm.



No, it's not a dunce's cap. The protagonist's pointy helmet was heavily inspired by the Catholic capirote robe – The Game Kitchen's Spanish roots shine through.



The trailers show off levels which translate your characters into voxels, like 3D versions of the original sprites.

41

SONIC SUPERSTARS

Knuckling down with Sega's big return to 2D

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA AUTUMN 2023 / PUB SEGA / DEV ARZEST, SONIC TEAM / PLAYERS 1-4

Our time with the latest Sonic goes by all too fast. Which is kind of a selling point for this series, admittedly – but Superstars adds so much to the old 2D formula that only having half an hour with the game on the Play Days showfloor forces us to rush past an awful lot. Plumping first for the main man and then switching to Knuckles means we don't get to wield Amy Rose's hammer, for example, and having a single pass through each Zone rules out exploring the multiple routes that are stacked and looped through every level.

HOGGING THE SCREEN

Most important of all, though, we don't have the opportunity to try out the four-player co-op, which is a first for the series. It's hard to imagine how the unremitting speed

will be manageable when you're bouncing around the screen with three equally speedy and nimble pals – from the trailers it looks like absolute chaos, and not of the emerald variety.

Speaking of which, we *do* manage to slow down just enough to leap through a few of the portals that appear above Star Post checkpoints, and so experience Superstars'

"FOUR-PLAYER CO-OP LOOKS LIKE ABSOLUTE CHAOS, AND NOT OF THE EMERALD VARIETY."

equivalent of the emerald-chasing minigames. There's a 3D into-the-screen one where you pick anchor points to swing from as you chase your prize, and another that goes a bit Sonic Spinball, where your character is bunched up into a ball

and must bounce around a maze that's constantly rotating. In finest series tradition, they're a bit fiddlier than seems strictly necessary, but they do reward you with access to the game's brand-new powers, to be activated as often as you like.

The Water power transforms you into H₂O so you can race up waterfalls to explore hidden areas, while Avatar fires dozens of clones

of your character across the screen at once. The latter proves especially handy during a couple of fiendish boss fights, as an azure tidal wave of Sonics crashes against the hull of our giant robotic foe. These bosses

might be the highlight of what we play: requiring a bit of puzzling as well as quick reflexes to beat, they're a welcome reason to slow down, even if it's just for a moment. We look forward to tackling them with some friends too.

THE HOT 50

A Sargon appears in the list of kings of ancient Persia – is there a chance the Prince won't survive this story?

40

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE LOST CROWN

Akkad action

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 18 JAN / **PUB** UBISOFT
DEV UBISOFT MONTPELLIER / **PLAYERS** 1

This long-running series is no stranger to new looks and new approaches, but this time it's got a new hero as well. The Prince has been kidnapped, so it's up to young warrior Sargon (wielding two swords and a six-pack you could grate cheese on) to rescue him in this side-scrolling metroidvania.

Puzzles and giant beasts inspired by Persian mythology await. In modern POP style, mastering acrobatic platforming is key to success, but you also need to be willing to explore the semi-open world. Unlocking powers means unlocking more ways to manipulate the environment, opening additional paths. Time is again your plaything, combining with gravity-defying moves to serve up fast yet tactical combat. Fit for a king!

39

SALTSEA CHRONICLES

Who are you shipping?

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** 2023 / **PUB** DIE GUTE FABRIK
DEV DIE GUTE FABRIK / **PLAYERS** 1

This one captured our attention with its gorgeous storybook-like art style. The Saltsea of the title is a flooded but sadly Kevin Costnerless world, which means many islands to visit. You and the rest of the crew are on the search for your missing captain, uncovering a wider conspiracy along the way, and recruiting new members for your crew as you sail the ocean, stopping off at islands en route (including one ruled by cats). With the promise of different playthroughs providing very different experiences, we're ready to get on board.



38

WARHAMMER AGE OF SIGMAR: REALMS OF RUIN

Controlled Chaos

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** TBC / **PUB** FRONTIER DEVELOPMENTS / **DEV** FRONTIER DEVELOPMENTS / **PLAYERS** 1-4

While it's difficult to make an RTS work on console, Frontier is determined to prove it can be done well. This means a single-player campaign with a beefy narrative, involving four playable factions, plus 1v1 or 2v2 multiplayer matches. Each of the many unit types has been modelled to match its tabletop equivalent.



37

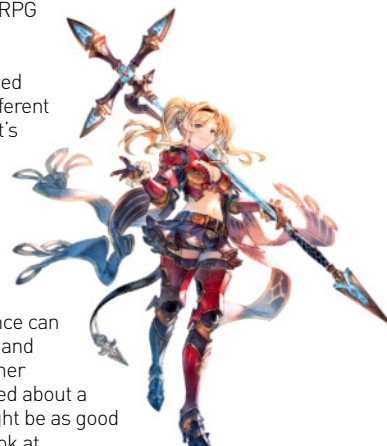
GRANBLUE FANTASY: RELINK

The sky's no limit

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** WINTER 2023 / **PUB** CYGAMES
DEV CYGAMES, PLATINUMGAMES / **PLAYERS** 1-4

Granblue Fantasy has been slowly but surely gaining traction in the West, and this epic ARPG

will surely give its popularity a boost. Originally announced under a slightly different title back in 2016, it's finally about to leave the development oven. PlatinumGames' involvement ended in 2019, but the studio's influence can be seen in the fast and fluid combat, another reason to get excited about a game that just might be as good to play as it is to look at.





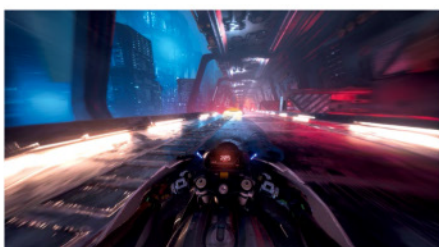
36

GHOSTRUNNER 2

Arcology de triumph

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** TBC 2023 / **PUB** 505 GAMES
DEV ONE MORE LEVEL / **PLAYERS** 1

The first Ghostrunner, which saw you scaling a towering arcology, was unforgivingly difficult yet immensely satisfying to succeed at, and pumped full of that elusive one-more-go juice. The sequel is unlikely to be a pushover either, but it's introducing many interesting elements that should expand on the original. Motorbike sections! A dialogue system! More of the world to explore outside of the prequel's tower! Throw in more versatile boss encounters and a revamped upgrade system, and we have something to keep a close eye on.



35

PHANTOM BLADE ZERO

The Soul survivor

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** TBC / **PUB** S-GAME
DEV S-GAME / **PLAYERS** 1

There's a miserable beauty to this game's world, dark as it is while being impeccably detailed. This seems appropriate given that your character, Soul, has only 66 days left to live, which he largely fills by engaging in mesmerisingly rapid and intricate combat. Kung fu is a huge influence on the game; Kenji Tanigaki – stuntman, stunt co-ordinator, and fight co-ordinator on many kung fu movies – has even been brought in as action director. It'll kick ass.



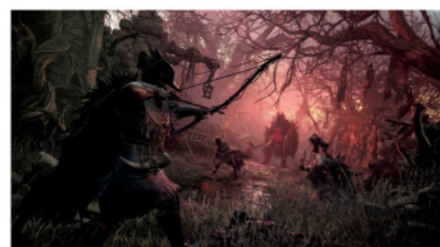
34

LORDS OF THE FALLEN

Worlds to conquer

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** 13 OCT / **PUB** CI GAMES
DEV HEXWORKS / **PLAYERS** 1-2 (PLUS PVP)

Yes, there's already a game with this name, but this one is an all-new, rebooted adventure. It's still a soulslike (now with very impressive graphics), but it boasts a world over five times larger than that of the first game. Fighting your way through two parallel worlds, you're able to make your character your own in terms of appearance, class, and upgrades. Whatever your build, be sure to make it good, as there are some huge bosses...





Thought nothing was going to tempt you back into Night City after the base game's notoriously rocky launch? *Idris Elba*. Now we're all tempted.



CYBERPUNK 2077: PHANTOM LIBERTY

Chipping back in – again

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** 26 SEP / **PUB** CD PROJEKT
DEV CD PROJEKT RED / **PLAYERS** 1

This PS5-exclusive DLC asks: 'Are you a bad enough dude to save the president after her orbital shuttle crash-lands in Night City's most dangerous district?' For V, with the promise of a cure for what will otherwise kill them dangling in the balance, there is no answer other than 'Yes.'

In addition to city-within-a-city Dogtown and a slew of new characters (including a covert intelligence agent played by Idris

unspools into many twisting threads of intrigue. When the angry rocker trapped inside your head is the only one who will give it to you straight, you know the chips are down. It's hard to know who to trust, and the road to the brand-new game ending promises to be unpredictable.

The DLC's launch will also see a number of improvements for the base game, including expanded opportunities for vehicular combat and an overhaul of how the police

"AS A SPY THRILLER, WHAT STARTS AS A SEARCH-AND-RESCUE MISSION UNSPOOLS INTO TWISTING THREADS OF INTRIGUE."

Elba), this DLC offers plenty of reasons to return. There are extra cyberware enhancements, more gigs, and air drops that'll properly induct you into the dog-eat-dog spirit of the district as everyone dukes it out for crash-landed loot.

As a spy thriller, what starts as a – well, not *exactly* simple – search-and-rescue mission

behave. Whether that makes visiting Night City worth it (for the third time for Team PLAY) remains to be seen, but it's clear CD Projekt Red is committed to this take on a futuristic dystopia. The director, Gabe Amatangelo, is set to lead Cyberpunk's sequel project, so Phantom Liberty could be an interesting vision of the future in more ways than one.



STILL WAKES THE DEEP

Coming up for air

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** 2024 / **PUB** SECRET MODE
DEV THE CHINESE ROOM / **PLAYERS** 1

The year is 1975 and Caz McLeary is running from something. Initially the Glaswegian ex-boxer was fleeing an assault charge back on the shore, which led him to take a job on the Beira D oil rig.

Much of the game's first act is scored by the simmering mundane, base-level tension this causes. Will Caz's wife Suze take him back? Will he have to serve time? What's for lunch? Growing accustomed to the isolation of the rig, and getting to know your colleagues forms an almost documentary-like foundation for what is to follow.

Then the Beira D drills into *something* unexpected, and all hell breaks loose.

Creative director John McCormack, talking to our sister mag, Edge, said the original idea was essentially for a Ken Loach documentary that goes horribly wrong mid-production – and Stanley Kubrick takes over what remains.

SEA SICK

The horror lurking at the heart of The Chinese Room's latest does not reveal



itself immediately, and you see its influence on your environment and your crewmates long before you get a proper eyeful. The *something* in question borrows from a veritable monster mash of horror movies, such as *The Thing* and *Annihilation*, without being overly reliant on any one of its sources of inspiration. Even referencing those two flicks is far from giving you the whole picture of what lurks on the oil rig, and the situation is complicated by the fact that you're unable to fight back against this threat.

Instead, Caz must play a deadly game of hide and seek, all while assessing who else has survived and how they can all escape the rapidly deteriorating rig. Naturally, that's all easier said than done – though Caz should have the upper hand, having called this hulking skeleton of metal home for the past span.

We say *should*. A raging storm has flooded much of the structure, rendering otherwise-familiar living quarters and corridors unrecognisable under feet of murky salt water. Much like the, uhm,

'antagonist' now moving around on the rig, the North Sea doesn't care that Caz wants to get home to his loved ones.

Between the strange foe and the structural damage caused by the uncaring undulation of the North Sea, you're left feeling that you avoided disaster by only a narrow margin – you jimmied open the hatch just in time, you just found a place to hide with seconds to spare, you only escaped drowning by the skin of your teeth. You cannot fight, but you will survive.

The level of authenticity in the setting is impressive, from the realistic-looking oil rig to some genuine Scots swearing.

31

THE CREW MOTORFEST

Reinventing the wheel

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 14 SEP / **PUB** UBISOFT
DEV UBISOFT IVORY TOWER / **PLAYERS** MULTI

The Crew was a gritty crime thriller, then transformed into an upbeat driving MMORPG for The Crew 2, and the third entry in Ubisoft's flagship racing franchise seems set to radically reinvent the formula once again. Taking a leaf out of the Forza Horizon playbook, the prevailing theme this time around is Motorfest – an all-encompassing motorsports festival on the Hawaiian island of O'ahu.

Festival Playlists, linear campaigns that offer a quick taste of different aspects of car culture, are the biggest addition, presenting enticing opportunities for you to get behind the wheel of everything from rare vintage classics to cutting-edge supercars. They're more than

standard races, with special visual effects and significant changes to the world to emphasise the theme. Racing rare Japanese sports cars is eternally cool, but doing so on cyberpunk-inspired neon-lit streets makes it even better. While there will be 15 campaigns available at launch, as a full-on live service you can expect a steady stream of fresh arrivals over the next few years.

FULL SPEED

Of course, one of the biggest draws of any racer are its snazzy rides and Motorfest is no slouch when it comes to the vehicle selection. Although the planes and boats of the second entry are nowhere to be seen, there are over 600 unique

cars to make up for it. With a huge selection of unlockable parts, not to mention a comprehensive livery editor, each is highly customisable and the spacious shared open world is the perfect environment to

show off some of your proudest creations. As with the Festival Playlists, you can expect even more vehicles to be added over time both in free updates and as part of the paid season pass.

30

TOWERS OF AGHASBA

Hand crafting a home

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** SUMMER 2024 / **PUB** DREAMLIT INC
DEV DREAMLIT INC / **PLAYERS** 1

Promised a bountiful paradise, the Shimu tribe return to their ancestral homeland only to find it seemingly devoid of life. The gods who still wander here don't exactly welcome their return either, blaming humans for the sorry state of what remains. However, what once was lost may yet be restored.

This open world building game presents a unique challenge, then.

Yes, you need to construct a new home for the Shimu, but all you create must coexist with the native ecosystem. It's up to you to breathe life back into the dead lands, planting alien plant life and nurturing it as it grows. The creatures are the headline act though, with plenty of weird and wonderful beasts in the skies above as well as the water below – this is a place worth getting lost in.



Watch your step – who knows where you'd end up if you took a tumble here? Though between the glider and the wildlife, perhaps it won't be far from home.

29

RESISTOR

Dying to be there

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** TBC / **PUB** PQUBE
DEV LONG WAY HOME / **PLAYERS** 1

We've often wondered what would happen if you combined animated series Oban Star-Racers with feature film Red Line – and perhaps developer Long Way Home has the answer.

Aster was determined to leave racing behind her, but her mother's flagging health demands she get back behind the wheel. In a future when corporations reign over their own city-states, anyone outside

their walls winds up running on fumes unless they can take the top spot in the yearly corp-sponsored death races. With a grand prize of citizenship that includes healthcare, Aster has to put it all on the line.

Narrative-heavy with multiple endings, there's also a wasteland to explore for side-missions and more. The races themselves are less chill, naturally, featuring vehicular combat full of explosive moves.



There's a surprising amount besides racing to find in the wastes, from side-quests to take on to larger-than-life characters to get to know.

Details are picked out in manga-style pen strokes, from Beelzebub's scowl lines to the wear and tear on your tank.



SAND LAND

A handsome devil of a manga adaptation

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** TBC / **PUB** BANDAI NAMCO / **DEV** ILCA INC / **PLAYERS** 1

Unless you're a dedicated manga-head, you might not be familiar with Sand Land, so let's get you all caught up. Written and drawn by Akira 'Dragon Ball' Toriyama, this 2000 manga series imagines a water-starved wasteland, in a future so far-flung that at one point the characters discover the ultimate pre-apocalyptic artefact: a PlayStation 6. (Seriously.)

The manga's lead character – and the one you'll be playing as in this action-RPG adaptation – is Beelzebub, a diminutive demon with a heart of gold. Oh, yeah, did we forget to mention? This Mad Max-style dystopia also has demons in it. And dinosaurs, but we'll get to those in a minute.

As you'd hope, the game looks like a manga come to life. The

environments are colourful but a little nondescript, but really that's because the developers want you to be focussing on what's going on in the foreground. Beelzebub looks exactly like Toriyama drew him, which is to say a bit like someone dipped Bart Simpson in a barrel of Ribena and popped a pair of goggles

“THIS MAD MAX-STYLE DYSTOPIA ALSO HAS DEMONS IN IT. AND DINOSAURS.”

on him, while elderly Sheriff Rao is more of a Clint Eastwood type, and Thief (yep, that's his whole name) is basically Dragon Ball Z's Master Roshi as an angry gnome. But as cool as the characters are, they might all be outshone by the true

stars of the show, Toriyama's lovingly detailed vehicles.

DINO CRISIS

Sand Land's most iconic ride is the trio's squat battle tank, but this is just one of many vehicles you can commandeer. And all, apparently, can be modified. Our demo doesn't offer a chance to try out vehicle customisation, but we do get to drive a golf cart in a dramatic towards-the-camera chase sequence, pursued by a kind of grinning sandworm, and putter around the desert in a tank. Our guide points out a nearby raptor, minding their own business, and tells us to give the tank's cannon a go. BOOM! As the dinosaur disappears in a cloud of smoke, it's hard not to feel guilty. Maybe Beelzebub isn't all *that* good-hearted. But then he is a demon, after all.



27

REVENANT HILL

A hell of a way to go

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** TBC / **PUB** FINJI
DEV THE GLORY SOCIETY / **PLAYERS** 1

They say cats have nine lives, but what about their ambitions? In this game, stray kitty Twigs is hoping to become a witch's familiar. Unfortunately, the barn he called home burned down, leaving him with nothing but a log on the perimeter of an abandoned graveyard – but it's not all bad.

The supernatural squad that calls those stones home might be able to do Twigs a solid, though one good turn deserves another. Boasting the gorgeous storybook stylings of *Night In The Woods*, this promises a tale of community working together to make the most out of not very much. Putting down roots literally and metaphorically, you grow crops, run through fields, make friends, fling curses, make enemies, and much more.



26

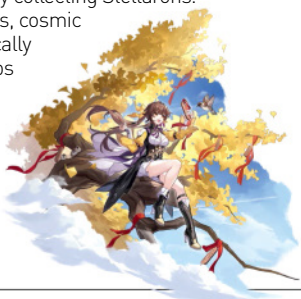
HONKAI: STAR RAIL

Fly me to the moon

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** Q4 2023 / **PUB** HOYOVERSE
DEV HOYOVERSE / **PLAYERS** 1 (AMBIENT ONLINE MULTIPLAYER FEATURES)

Genshin goes turn-based in this sprawling free-to-play RPG. Featuring all the impeccably dressed characters you'd expect, though now with a science-fantasy sheen, gacha mechanics are what stand between you and assembling the adventuring party of your dreams.

The story sees you making tracks on a special space train, the Astral Express, as you bounce around the galaxy collecting Stellarons. These mysterious, cosmic entities are basically souped-up bombs from beyond the stars – and one beats at the centre of your character's being. That's... probably fine, right?



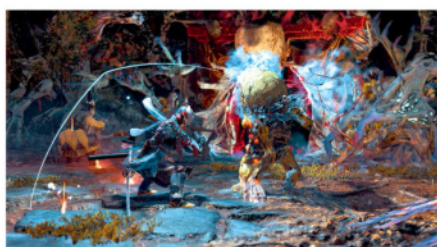
25

KUNITSU-GAMI: PATH OF THE GODDESS

Bang! And the corruption is gone

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** TBC / **PUB** CAPCOM
DEV CAPCOM / **PLAYERS** 1

Some stains require more than elbow grease to remove. This action strategy title borrows from Japanese folklore. To clear the corruption from a spiritually defiled mountain, the Spirit Stone Maiden must perform a rite, but her path forward is blocked. That's where you come in, as her guide on cleanup duty.



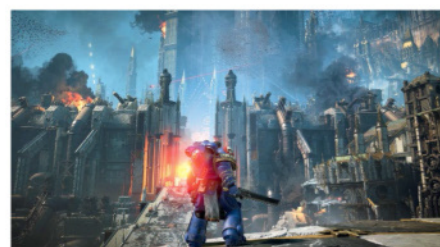
24

WARHAMMER 40,000: SPACE MARINE 2

Far from 'armless

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** WINTER 2023 **PUB** FOCUS
ENTERTAINMENT / **DEV** SABER INTERACTIVE **PLAYERS** 1-3

The long-awaited followup to the 2011 game sees Captain Titus finally returning (though with a new voice, performed by Clive Standen). It's set during the fourth Tyranid war, in the Era Indomitus. It's time to once again slash and shoot your way through Tyranid hordes on your tod or in co-op with two comrades.





"STRAY KITTY TWIGS IS
HOPING TO BECOME A
WITCH'S FAMILIAR."

23

MARATHON

In the lead

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** TBC
PUB BUNGIE / **DEV** BUNGIE / **PLAYERS** MULTI

Loosely based upon a much-loved trilogy of '90s first-person shooters, this return is very much a reimagining. Rather than being a straight FPS it's now a PvP extraction shooter, and Bungie is definitely abandoning the atmosphere of all that came before, though the story's still set in the Tau Ceti system, where you're running and gunning as a cybernetic mercenary while a timer clicks down at your back. It's up for debate what will snuff you out first – dwindling oxygen or another marksman's shot. Make every step count.



22

NEVA

Paw-pad platforming

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** TBC / **PUB** DEVOLVER DIGITAL
DEV NOMADA STUDIO / **PLAYERS** 1

From the creators of artsy-platformer Gris comes a beautifully animated adventure set in a world that's slowly dying. It's the story of a girl and her wolf, who grows up from a cub as the story progresses. Platforming here requires the co-operation of the two characters. Between every jump, there are puzzles and combat to keep swordswoman Alba and her furry friend on their toes. If that announcement trailer is anything to go by, we don't doubt this tale of two friends searching for a new home is one that won't leave a dry eye in the house.



21

THE PLUCKY SQUIRE

Fulfil a multi-dimensional destiny

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** 2023 / **PUB** DEVOLVER DIGITAL
DEV ALL POSSIBLE FUTURES / **PLAYERS** 1

Nobody likes a sore loser, and the sorcerer Humgrump is the ouchiest of them all. Far from content to accept his fated defeat at the hands of hero Jot, he kicks him out of the very pages they're both inked upon. Questing between two and three dimensions, it's up to Jot to find his buds Violet, Thrash, and Pip so that they can finish the story together. But they'll find far more than they bargained for when they venture beyond the page...



20

DEATH STRANDING 2

Rise again

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** TBC / **PUB** SONY / **DEV** KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS
PLAYERS 1 (AMBIENT ONLINE MULTIPLAYER FEATURES)

We're back, BB. And so are returning stars Norman Reedus as on-the-run-protagonist Sam and Lea Seydoux as Fragile. There will be some new faces among the big-name cast too. Though we don't know much about the role either will play, actors Elle Fanning (known for Maleficent and Catherine The Great) and Shioli Kutsuna (of Deadpool 2 and Murder Mystery fame most recently) will be welcomed into the fold.

Also re-entering the fray is Troy Baker, though whether he's back as the villainous Higgs quite as we knew him is, let us say, unclear. This time around his role appears to be associated with a cultish band of antagonists rocking red armour. He also looks set to shred one hell of a riff on a blood-toned guitar.

And all of that is without even mentioning the truly horrifying, newly tentacular form we've seen at least one of the bottled babies

take. Quite what *that's* all about remains to be seen.

CHASING TRAILS

Activity-wise, we'll probably be wombling free overground once again. Social Strand mechanics will make a comeback, seeing players combining resources to build vital infrastructure, from roads to ziplines. That said, new missions included in the Director's Cut of the first game feature locations within structures – a taste of things to come?

Anyway, foregrounding all of this is the rise of a new... ally? Adversary? The organisation in question is called Drawbridge, and Fragile, for whatever reason, has thrown her lot in with them. This is the impetus behind her seeking out Sam, and asking him to hit the road once more. Judging by their submersible hardware, he doesn't have much scope to refuse them.

This all-star cast is set to grow with more than a few additions, to say nothing of the hardware upgrade.

19

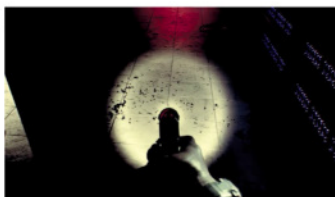
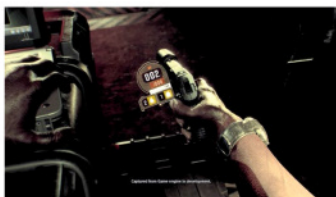
FIREWALL ULTRA

Cat meets mouse

FORMAT PSVR2 / **ETA** 2023 / **PUB** SONY
DEV FIRST CONTACT ENTERTAINMENT / **PLAYERS** 8

Do you want to play a VR shooter that crams you into the usual framework? Or do you want to play one that uses every trick in the PSVR2 playbook to immerse you in a tense game of cat-and-mouse, forcing you to crane your neck to pinpoint the sounds around you and use your digital body to get the upper hand? If you want the latter – and you do – then Firewall Ultra is the answer.

Individual weapons have unique haptic feedback so they all feel different to handle. When you aim down sights, the headset can track your eye to adjust your aim. You can even use your hand to temporarily dim flashlight weapon attachments, or your body to peek around corners. With fast-paced rounds of PvP that builds on the foundations of predecessor Zero Hour, we might have a new VR multiplayer favourite.



Tactile and tense, with distinct-feeling weapons, we can't wait to get our hands on this tightly-wound VR shooter. Keep an ear out for more on this one.

18

SILENT HILL 2 REMAKE

Chasing ghosts

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** TBC / **PUB** KONAMI
DEV BLOOBER TEAM / **PLAYERS** 1

Twenty years of restless dreams later, we're still seeing that town. This ground-up-remake reimagines the survival horror classic with a modern camera and an all-new voice cast.

In case you're not well versed in all things Silent Hill, you play as James Sunderland, who ventures to the titular town in search of his wife Mary. She's written that she's here, waiting for him, though James

insists she passed away three years ago. Desperate to reunite despite the impossibility of it all, James sets out, and instead finds another woman, Maria, who could pass for his late wife's twin. Something definitely isn't right – for a start, fog blankets the town and monsters lurch through the gloom. But James has nothing else, and so accompanies Maria, and attempts to make sense of the senseless.



Developer Bloober Team may be no stranger to horror, its past games including Layers Of Fear, but will this be a nightmare worth reliving? Time will tell.



Prepare to wince as you and your opponent end up moments away from glory (then either pump the air or hang your head in shame).

17

TEKKEN 8

Iron fists get heated

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** TBC / **PUB** BANDAI NAMCO ENTERTAINMENT / **DEV** BANDAI NAMCO ENTERTAINMENT / **PLAYERS** 1-2

With rounds that can last less than a minute, in Tekken mere seconds can change the flow of a whole match. For the eighth game those mechanics have been honed to a knife's edge, not only to make those decisive moments more plentiful but to ensure both taking part in the entangling limbs for yourself and simply watching high-level players tussle is more exhilarating than ever.

Tekken 8 is all about giving the players on both sides of the ring the tools to make some incredible comebacks, allowing them to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat – as long as they've got the skills to pull it off. The new Heat System is vital to this, giving every fighter about ten seconds of power-up time every round, extended as they dish out damage. Activated by using **RT** to initiate a smash attack or when you

land some core combos, being in Heat [Er... – ed] doesn't just boost your attack power, it allows you to punch right through pesky guarding to deal greyed-out chip damage. Let your opponent strike back, though, and they can recover that damage (but clean hits will otherwise confirm it). Turtling won't do anyone any good, meaning you're incentivised to hit back.

"IF YOU'RE WISE YOU'LL ENSURE YOU CAP OFF YOUR HEAT WITH A HEAT SMASH."

Every onslaught has its end, and if you're wise you'll ensure you cap off your Heat with a Heat Smash. It'll always end Heat no matter when you use it, but if you don't use it, you'll lose it. Given a Smash is extremely powerful, you won't want

to waste it as it can turn even dire odds back into your favour if you're able to land it.

FIRED UP

Beyond buffing them up, Heat also develops each fighter's unique abilities. The demonic Kazuya Mishima, for example, fully transforms into his Devil form, complete with wings and horns, while masked wrestler King is able to soak up even more damage while running at you to lock you into devastating chains of throws. It's all about finding the rhythm that suits your play, and every fighter has their own quirks that could click precisely with the way you end up wanting to fight. It helps that PS5 doesn't just make Tekken 8 look extremely pretty, but that the SSD means rematches can be under way within seconds, so you needn't stay out of the Heat for long.



FOAMSTARS

Will it hit a foam run?

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** TBC / **PUB** SQUARE ENIX / **DEV** SQUARE ENIX
PLAYERS 8

You might find it hard to imagine anyone getting aggressive when they're dashing around in a glittering sea of pastel blue and pink foam, but hey, that's what's happening. No sooner have we plastered the arena before us with bubblegum-pink bubbles – neon-soaked high rises crowding around us, puncturing the inky sky like a gaudier wannabe Vegas – than the other team have redecorated the place in blue foam again. Sigh.

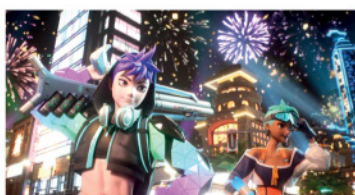
You don't have to have spent much – well, any – time with Nintendo's Splatoon to see the comparison between that game and

because we haven't spent as much time surfing the ink as our competitors, but foaming up the arena and riding the bubbles at Summer Game Fest doesn't feel quite as satisfying as getting paint-happy in Foamstars' inky competitor, and with so much going on at once – even with an admirably restrained HUD, there are foam and bubbles and emotes and hit bars and, of course, seven other players cluttering up the screen – it's easy to be confused, and distracted, by the sheer volume of visual noise. And while the ability to build bubbles on bubbles sounds great in theory – a notable departure from the Splatoon blueprint that

“WORKING YOUR WAY THROUGH THE CAST AND EXPERIMENTING WITH THEIR TRICKS AND GADGETS IS UNDENIABLY GOOD FUN.”

this, and while Foamstars' glossy presentation and foam party aesthetic may hint at a more mature offering, what we've seen of the party shooter's combat mechanics thus far suggests they have more in common with Splatoon than not. And like Splatoon, the conceit is beautifully simple: the team with the most kills wins.

As the old cliché reminds us, simple to play doesn't mean simple to master, though. Maybe it's



Every character has their own abilities and gadgets, so you can find your fave.

enables you to sculpt additional terrain to suit your strategy – again, all it really does is obscure the battlefield and make it harder to figure out what's what. Even killing a downed enemy by surfing into them can feel stickily unwieldy.

FOAM-O

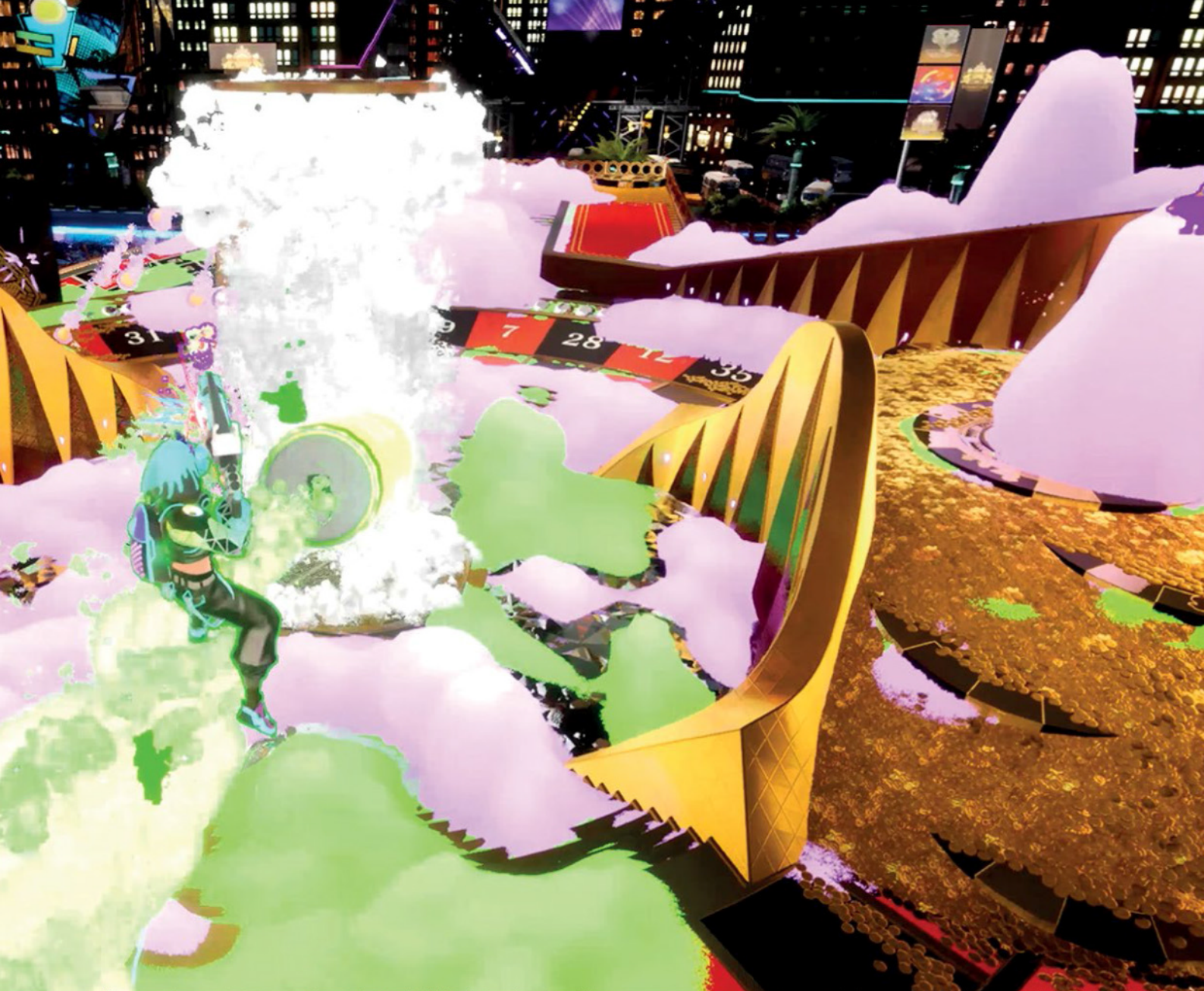
What does elevate Foamstars, however, is the shooter's hero roster. As you no doubt expect, each character boasts a slightly different skill and ability from the next, and working your way through the cast and experimenting with their individual, distinct tricks and gadgets is undeniably good fun. In the brief time we have with Foamstars it's hard to pick a front runner, but we've no doubt the lobbies themselves will eventually let us know which characters are best avoided and



which cast members complement each other.

There's also the neat addition of the Smash The Star mode, too, which turns a laser focus on the best-performing players late in the game. Hit your seven kills first, and the opposing team's star player will light up like a Christmas tree, and your job will be to eradicate them before the opposing team can eradicate yours. That said, the cheers may turn to tears if, like us, you feel the frustration of getting a clean sheet to the Star Player... only to have your Star Player instantly vapourised by your opposition.

Quite where Foamstars will sit amid its plentiful brethren of free-to-play party shooters remains to be seen. While we never feel quite at one with the stickiness of the foam-soaked arena, there's no denying Foamstars' bright and bubbly personality, which could give it an advantage over more serious competition. Expect to hear more about the 4v4 multiplayer shooter in the “near future”.



1 Splash the foam liberally but strategically to soak your pals, your surroundings, or your enemies... **2** Foam is, of course, three-dimensional, so you can use it to reshape the environment. (A touch of the Fortnites there, perhaps, building your way to victory.) **3** The arenas are fairly featureless, presumably to allow you to reshape them as you prefer. **4** Foam doesn't just build up on the surfaces around you, it also sticks to players. Once a person's covered they can either be tackled and finished off by a rival player, or smashed free by an ally.



HOPE AND HOMES FOR CHILDREN



URGENT APPEAL



Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine is not just a humanitarian crisis for the Ukrainian people; it's a child protection emergency.

Up to 100,000 children warehoused in Ukraine's vast orphanage system – a network of over 700 buildings – risk being forgotten. Left to face the dangers of war alone as staff flee. As families are torn apart or forced from their homes, many more children are at risk of being separated from the love and protection they desperately need. Worse still, they are at risk of trafficking, or being placed in overcrowded, understaffed and poorly resourced orphanages in border countries.

We must act now.

Born out of the Balkans conflict 30 years ago, we've championed the vital importance of family and community-based care of children and our teams are on the ground in Ukraine, Moldova and Romania to ensure this war does not rob children of the love and protection they need now more than ever. Across all three countries, we're directly supporting displaced families and unaccompanied children with material

and emotional support. We're working closely with authorities to keep families together when they are at their most vulnerable and to fight for the safe tracking, monitoring and care for children without parental care. And we won't stop when the fighting stops.

Will you help us by donating?

With your help, we can avert a child protection crisis of epic proportions and ensure children are protected and kept in families. Never orphanages.

To help protect vulnerable children, donate online at: **www.hopeandhomes.org/donate**. Or call **01722 790 111** Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm.

Please quote **FP22 - G&E** when making your donation.

In the event that funds raised exceed what is needed to deliver Hope and Homes for Children immediate and longer-term response to this crisis, we will use donations where the need is greatest.

HOPE AND HOMES FOR CHILDREN



I would like to make a donation to Hope and Homes for Children:

Name		Address	
Tel	Email		
I enclose a cheque for £ <input type="text"/> made payable to Hope and Homes for Children or please debit £ <input type="text"/>			
from my credit/debit card (details below)			
I would like to donate by debit/credit card			
<input type="checkbox"/> Visa	<input type="checkbox"/> Mastercard	<input type="checkbox"/> Maestro	<input type="checkbox"/> CAF card
Card no.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Start date	<input type="text"/>	Expiry date	<input type="text"/>
Issue no.	<input type="text"/>	Security no.	<input type="text"/>
Signature		Date	

giftaid it

Make your gift grow by 25% at no extra cost to you

☐ I want to Gift Aid my donation and any donations I make in the future or have made in the past 4 years to Hope and Homes for Children. I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference. Gift Aid will be used to fund Hope and Homes for Children's general work.

Name of taxpayer	Today's date

Please let us know if you would like to hear from us:

☐ by phone ☐ by email
☐ please tick here if you would NOT like to hear from us by post.

Please make cheques payable to 'Hope and Homes for Children' and send to Hope and Homes for Children, FREEPOST RTKX-TYLS-JHHB, East Clyffe Farm Barn, Salisbury Road, Steeple Langford, Salisbury SP3 4BF.

You can view our privacy policy here www.hopeandhomes.org/privacy.

Registered charity (No. 1089490) FP22 - G&E

15

METAL GEAR DELTA

Blast from the past

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** TBC / **PUB** KONAMI
DEV KONAMI, VIRTUOUS / **PLAYERS** 1

At the time of the Cold War, Naked Snake (the spitting image of Solid Snake) undertakes a mission to rescue a scientist and stop the deployment of the Shagohod superweapon – all while butting heads with his former mentor, The Boss, who defected from the US for unclear reasons. As this is a prequel, Naked Snake's tools for completing his mission are lower-tech than Solid's, so he has to do everything from manually changing camouflage outfits to hunting wildlife for sustenance.

Even so, don't expect this remake of MGS3 (first released in 2004 to critical acclaim) to revolutionise the battlefield. Metal Gear Delta's relationship with the original is one of on-site procurement, taking what's already there in an attempt to make something better.

What that means is a gorgeous visual overhaul, especially

noticeable in Tselinoyarsk's forested regions. But Delta is still built on the foundations of the original. In what we've seen, we recognise distinctive bits of geography that mean while Delta might play differently (we'd expect it to be more in line with the level of fine-tuned control you have in MGS V), the challenges you'll face will largely be the same. As will the voice acting, as the original recordings are being reused.

As this is the first game in the Metal Gear timeline, it's an excellent starting point for new players, but if you want to catch up on the series, the Metal Gear Master Collection Vol. 1 is due to be released ahead of Delta, and collects together the first two MSX games, as well as the three PS2 MGS games including some bonuses. Neither Snake will have to sneak to get behind the enemy lines of our hearts.

Can you sneak while also oohing and ahing at the lovely makeover?

14

WORLD OF HORROR

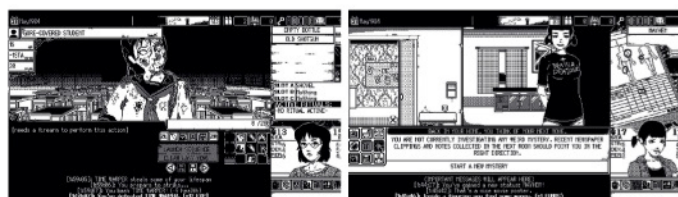
Stop us if you've heard this one before

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 2023 / **PUB** YSBRYD GAMES
DEV PANSTASZ / **PLAYERS** 1

Borrowing the pixel-bound stylings of the text-based games of yesteryear, this roguelite horror RPG promises terror one bit at a time. Drawing heavily from eldritch horror and the dark imaginings of manga artist Junji Ito, World Of Horror's set in Shiokawa, Japan, a cursed place where the Old Gods are a threat.

As it's an RPG, there are turn-based fights, though as it is

also a roguelite, death is not always the end. Picking from multiple protagonists, no two runthroughs are ever quite alike thanks to a stacked deck of event cards. Among this horrifying royal flush are more than ten mysteries to muse upon, each one warping into fresh dread depending on who you're playing as and what paths they've walked before. Just remember, the sting doesn't always sink in at the end.



Talk about striking! This monochrome art style, which nods to the text-based games of the past, looks set to haunt our dreams in only the best way.

13

HADES II

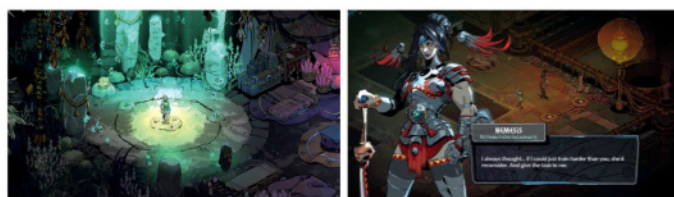
Hell is where home is

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** TBC / **PUB** SUPERGIANT GAMES
DEV SUPERGIANT GAMES / **PLAYERS** 1

Return to the underworld, this time as another less-well-known figure within Greek mythology. The first game followed Zagreus as he undertook the nigh-Sisyphean trial of escaping his dad's underworld, while this followup sees his sister Melinoë taking the lead to slay Chronos, the Titan of time.

Each of Zagreus' failed escape attempts ended with him being resurrected within the confines of

his father's house, and Melinoë's quest has a similarly roguelike runaround. This time, as the immortal princess of the underworld you're lost in a world of Magick, infusing your weapons of Night with its terrible power, as well as still seeking the boons of new Olympian gods. Make no mistake, the witchy vibes are strong with this one and we can't wait to delve deep into Melinoë's arcane abilities.



Magical girl Melinoë is based on a mythological figure often associated with both the moon and madness. Nemesis, on the right, should need no introduction.

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

the biggest Internet portal,
providing you various content:
brand new books, trending movies,
fresh magazines, hot games,
recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price

Cheap constant access to piping hot media

Protect your downloadings from Big brother

Safer, than torrent-trackers

18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages

Brand new content

One site



AVXLIVE ICU

AvaxHome - Your End Place

We have everything for all of your needs. Just open <https://avxlive.icu>

"THERE'S A DEFINITE GTA VIBE HERE, MIXED WITH THE FACTIONS SYSTEMS YOU MIGHT SEE IN A FALLOUT GAME."

12

STAR WARS OUTLAWS

We have a very good feeling about this

FORMAT PS5 / ETA 2024 / PUB UBISOFT / DEV MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT / PLAYERS 1

Here in the Outer Rim, the struggles of the Empire and Rebel Alliance seem like a distant problem. You're probably too busy worrying about staying alive to give much thought to politics, and while the odd Stormtrooper might patrol the streets of Jaunta's Hope, criminal syndicates run the show around here. The Hutts, the Pykes, the Ashiga Clan – if you're a resident of the Rim, these collectives of scum and villainy are either your employer or a threat to your life. Or, in the case of Kay Vess, both.

Kay lives from job to job, pulling off crimes with the assistance of

Nix, a furry little alien who fills the mandatory 'adorable companion' role (see also: Baby Yoda, BB-8, BD-1). She's into a bit of everything: smuggling, thieving – essentially all the jobs that Han Solo wasn't available to take on at this point in the Star Wars timeline. Because Outlaws is set in the one-year gap between Empire Strikes Back and Return Of The Jedi, as the Rebel Alliance recovers from its defeat on Hoth and Han enjoys a sabbatical as an oversized ornament in Jabba's Palace. And given he's glimpsed in the first trailer, it's likely the big slug will make at least a cameo here – we'd bet the Falcon on it.

But back to Kay, who finds herself, after a job gone awry, as the galaxy's Most Wanted. To escape the bounties on her head she has to take on contracts from the syndicates in preparation for the heist of a lifetime. It's a much bigger world of trouble than she's used to. Luckily she has a few tricks up the sleeves of her stylish leather jacket.

DON'T FORCE IT

As you're not some all-powerful Jedi, Kay's first choice of approach is generally stealth. She can quietly (and non-lethally!) take down any enemies she sneaks up on, and Nix is there to help her avoid getting >>



We do like little Nix. Wookies are handier in fights, perhaps, but they're hardly portable.



The open world design stretches beyond ground level, too, because Kay also has her own spaceship, the Trailblazer. Out in orbit you can fly freely, exploring the clusters of space debris left by past conflicts and creating some new ones in dogfights against enemy ships. It's not quite Star Wars Squadrons, tilting towards the arcade rather



than the sim end of the spectrum, but Ubisoft promises it'll throw everything from small skirmishes all the way to large-scale space battles your way. And if things get too hot, you can always simply punch it, blasting into hyperspace and on to your next destination.

THIS IS THE WAY

One thing that distinguishes Kay from the Han Solos of this world – apart from the fact that her equivalent of Chewbacca could fit in a backpack – is that she's a rookie pilot, at least at the beginning of the game. This leaves room for the game's RPG systems, which have only been teased so far: note the workbench aboard the Trailblazer, which surely implies a crafting system to accompany your character progression. It's always nice having the chance to guide your character's evolution, just as you'll guide Kay's decisions to shape the narrative.

What we've seen demonstrates this with a big Telltale-style choice, as in a cutscene Kay is asked to bribe an Imperial officer. Obey, and you'll be poorer, but safe from reprisals. Refuse, however, and the screen fills with enormous crimson block capitals spelling out 'WANTED', as the Stormtroopers and TIE fighters close in. There's a definite GTA vibe here, mixed with the factions

systems you might see in a Fallout game. Those decisions might boost or hurt your reputation with a syndicate, determining how likely its members are to consider you a friend or hunt you down. We'll be making peace with the Hutts at the first opportunity – we don't want Kay to end up frozen in carbonite.

A NEW HOPE

After just a little time with Kay, it's easy to root for her. She's immediately likeable, and distinct in a way that – just to pick a target at random – Cal Kestis has never really

seems she's gathering a crew, including ND-5, a droid who has driven certain corners of the internet wild with passion. We're not sure we see his appeal in that sense – it's a robot in a trenchcoat – but he's certainly a cool design we could stand to see more of.

And that's how this first taste of Outlaws leaves us. So far we've seen just one small slice of a game that, if Ubisoft can deliver on its promises, will be enormous. Planets that encompass rocky canyons, open scrubland and snowy goodness – all the Star Wars classics – and dotted

"IT'S EASY TO ROOT FOR KAY. SHE'S IMMEDIATELY LIKEABLE AND DISTINCT IN A WAY THAT CAL KESTIS HAS NEVER REALLY BEEN."

been. That's thanks in no small part to the casting of actor Humberly González (Ginny & Georgia, In The Dark, Far Cry 6), which is an important win for representation in this strangely white galaxy, but she's also a charismatic presence on her own terms, helping make Kay more than just a Solo stand-in. She's got a deep bond with Nix (who wouldn't, when presented with a furry little Muppet face like that?) but as she builds up to that heist it

with settlements ranging from one-tauntaun towns to cyberpunk megacities. And with every world being handcrafted rather than procedurally generated, there's more room for the kind of tightly choreographed spectacle that made up this initial showing. Speeder chases and tough decisions and beating up baddies with your little alien buddy. Who cares about the crime? We'll take one ticket to the Outer Rim, please.



BALDUR'S GATE 3

Roll for initiative!

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** 6 SEP / **PUB** LARIAN STUDIOS / **DEV** LARIAN STUDIOS
PLAYERS 1-2

Larian's latest empowers you to be exactly who you want to be as you quest towards the titular city – though most *Dungeons & Dragons* fans have their go-to's. As we covered in **PLAY #28's** cover feature, it's tiefling bards for us, and game director Swen Vincke doesn't need to think long when we ask him who he'd play: "Dragonborn wizard!"

Showing us what lies beyond early access on PC, each of Swen's custom protagonists is of a scaly persuasion.

"In this presentation, I was supposed to show the shadow monk – as you could see, I was shit!

using the PC release's point-and-click input.

IT TAKES GUTS

While you get a Player's-Handbook-worth of options for custom characters, you can choose to play as one of seven premade Origin characters if you prefer. Buff-tiefling-of-our-dreams Karlach is the penultimate person on this roster, with a volatile, infernal heart that may explode if she gets too... *excited*. Worth noting, especially as custom characters can party up with and even romance Origin characters.

The final Origin character is a unique beast we go hands-on with,

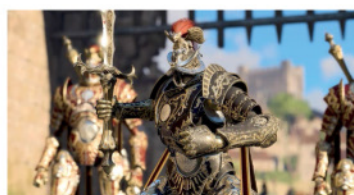
"THE PS5 UI OFFERS SKILLS, CHARACTER SHEETS, INVENTORIES, AND MORE ACCESSIBLE FROM CUSTOMISABLE RADIAL MENUS."

And it's just because the only thing I know how to play is the wizard," he laughs. To be fair, the Dragonborn monk in question still manages to stealthily pull off a bank heist, call out a djinn, and even find their way back from a land of dinosaurs with minimal incident.

There are always plenty of opportunities to recover from disaster or even forge an unexpected path forward. Whether you're flinging spells, poking with a bit of sharpened metal, or talking your way out of dire straits, it all feels natural to navigate on a DualSense. The bespoke PS5 UI offers: skills, character sheets, inventories, and more accessible from customisable radial menus on **11** and **12**; easy party management from a sidebar menu on **13**; plus simply pushing the left analogue stick to move, instead of

known as The Dark Urge. Their appearance and class fully customisable, this protagonist makes a decidedly different trek towards Baldur's Gate.

A number of companion characters may join you, such as himbo druid Halsin, drow warrior Minthara, or series fan-favourites Jaheira and Minsc – but definitely not tiefling bard Zafira. Most players will first encounter Zafira in the Druid Grove, as she attempts to put



A mechanical army patrols the city – and scrying eyes can tell them all about you.



into song how much her late teacher meant to her. The veritable cinnamon roll can be found elsewhere on the road towards the titular city, though not as a true travelling companion.

But when we're playing as The Dark Urge, the bright-eyed Zafira tells us our recent acts of derring-do have inspired her, and that she's desperate to join our cause. We heartily welcome her aboard the team, only realising later how this choice spells her doom.

MEMENTO MORI

The Dark Urge remembers almost nothing prior to their abduction by Mindflayers, but they're far from a typical amnesiac videogame hero. When confronted with a bloody scene, they don't turn away in disgust or vow to find those responsible – instead, a strange smile may play across their lips.

Swen explains, "So the original idea – I always wanted to do a story about a serial killer that didn't remember being a serial killer [...]. So



that's essentially how that began, [and] then the writers embraced it, [making] it a much, much, much more [original story]."

As *The Dark Urge*, your memories may have abandoned you, but murderous impulses are never far away. You can try to resist, forging ahead as a new hero with bloodstained hands, or lean all the way in. For just one of many examples, when you first meet Gale you find him stuck, with his hand hanging out of a portal. You can choose to pull him free, or lop off his oh-so-loose limb. But even if you try to make all the right choices, no-one's safety is guaranteed... as we find out one terrible night when Zafira calls on us at camp. Despite our devastated party's initial theories, Zafira's bloody fate has nothing to do with the Illithid tadpole swimming around our skull.

Swen elaborates, "Plugging that [into] a story in which you go to the city [previously terrorised by Bhaal,] the Lord Of Murder [...] makes for an interesting combination."



1 The titular city is huge, and uncovering its many mysteries makes up most of the concluding act three. **2** Voiced by actor Jason Isaacs, Lord Enver Gortash is a piece of work. Will you keep him on side or take him down? **3** The Dark Urge is an Origin character with a bloody twist. Even so, you're still free to choose whether you're the hero or the villain of this story.



There's no multiplayer mode here, but Dragon's Dogma 2 lets you summon friends' AI companions by visiting what we assume to be the Pawn Hub.



DRAGON'S DOGMA 2

They sure let the wait for this sequel dragon

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** TBC / **PUB** CAPCOM / **DEV** CAPCOM / **PLAYERS** 1

P sychonauts fans are no longer the only gang to finally get the sequel they've been begging for for a ridiculous number of years. This followup to the much-loved 2012 original promises to keep, and even improve upon, everything that made the first game so great. Yes, that includes a complete absence of multiplayer play; Dragon's Dogma is once again a dedicated solo experience.

That's not to say that you'll be exploring this fantastical world alone. Pawns – basically AI companions that you can design

Choice and variety remain part of the experience. You'll be able to customise your character's appearance and vocation, and the manner in which fights and certain situations play out will vary depending on your build and your playstyle. The ultimate goal, as before, is to reclaim your heart from the dragon that stole it (and it wasn't a 'dashing handsome and disarmingly witty' theft).

New to the series is the beastren race, reminiscent of The Elder Scrolls' khajiit (or, if you prefer, furrries). It's currently unclear how they factor into the experience (the lore states that

"WE'VE SEEN MONSTERS INCLUDING A TROLL, A GIANT HARPY, A GORGON... AND THE WHACKING GREAT DRAGON OF THE TITLE."

and command to an extent, but otherwise act independently – return. You'll be glad of the help. Although the reveal offered just a taste of the beasties you'll come up against, we've already seen monsters including a troll at least twice the player's height, a giant harpy, a gorgon... and, of course, the whacking great dragon of the title.

the story takes place "betwixt the domains of human and beastren"), but we hope they can be summoned as Pawns, at least.

Advances in AI should make the Pawns add more than ever to combat and atmosphere, and the power of PS5 is sure to give us a gorgeous fantasy world to explore. The dragon can't come to devour us again soon enough.



SWORD OF THE SEA

Giant Squid might have a smash hilt on its hands

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** TBC / **PUB** GIANT SQUID / **DEV** GIANT SQUID / **PLAYERS** 1

A s you can tell just from this massive screenshot, this is one gorgeous game. And given the studio making it, it's quite likely it will sound just as beautiful as it looks, and play fantastically too.

In order to understand what to expect from Giant Squid's latest game, we need to work our way backwards. Its last two releases – Abzû and The Pathless – were both beautiful, largely mellow experiences that told complex stories in a 'show, don't tell' way, where the flow of play was important. Go back further, before the developer even existed, and the roots of this approach are clear.

Before founding Giant Squid, Matt Nava was art director at Thatgamecompany, specifically working on Flower and Journey. If what you've seen of Sword Of The Sea makes you think of the latter, you're not alone, and that's why. Another reason to get excited is that Austin Wintory – who boasts Journey, Abzû, and The Pathless on his outrageously impressive CV – is on soundtrack duties.

"Sword Of The Sea is our most ambitious game to date," wrote Nava when the game was announced on the PlayStation blog. He and the rest of the team are aiming for it to be "equal parts meditative, exhilarating, and introspective". That's an interesting combination of adjectives there, but they just might pull it off. The world of SOTS is one of hypnotically undulating terrain, visually impressive, but damn difficult to navigate. Well, it *would* be if you didn't have your Hoversword.

HOVER NICE DAY

Your character is known as the Wraith, and it's your job to bring life back to the lonely world you find

yourself in. It sounds like you'll be making more use of the 'hover' side of the Hoversword, as you ride it skateboard-style to get from A to B (and perhaps pull some sick tricks between P and Q). The world design integrates skatepark features, so there are half-pipes to trick off and ramps to soar through the air from.

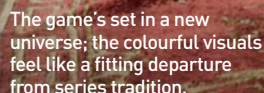
Skating areas haven't been incongruously dumped into the gorgeous world, however. Everything is naturally melted into the carefully designed surroundings, ensuring that the all-important flow isn't broken, and nor are the aesthetics. Whether you're speeding through a shipwreck, an ancient ruin, or across the plains, Giant Squid is aiming to make it feel like

part of a single, consistent, natural-feeling world.

It's not all exploration and skate tricks, mind you: we're warned of "massive leviathans that will stand in your way", which may be where the 'sword' part of the Hoversword comes in handy. Does this mean that combat will be rare but epic, *Shadow-Of-The-Colossus*-style?

It hasn't been officially confirmed that there will be *any* combat, but if there is, we look forward to seeing how it's implemented. In *The Pathless*, using a bow was integral to the speed and smoothness of movement, so there are exciting possibilities here. Regardless, we're already excited for our chance to jump on a Hoversword.

Sword Of The Sea looks set to draw a fine line between concept art and screenshots.



08

A killer comeback

With PlayStation itself entering a new era, NetherRealm couldn't have picked a more fitting time to usher in a new beginning for its flagship fighting series. Hot on the heels of the ending to *Mortal Kombat 11*'s Aftermath expansion, which saw hero Liu Kang ascend to godlike status and restart the entire universe from scratch, the action has moved to a brand-new timeline.

While being erased from existence is a grim deal for Earthrealm's former inhabitants, it's a fitting conclusion to the long-running arc and also makes this fresh start the perfect entry point for newcomers who would otherwise find themselves drowning in decades of dense lore.

Not everything is shiny and new; there are still plenty of familiar faces here, and long-time fans will

appreciate an updated roster that is largely dominated by reimagined versions of iconic characters – at least when it comes to what has been revealed so far. In a nicely nostalgic twist, the oldest characters, such as Scorpion and Kitana, are decked out in outfits that closely resemble their debut ones.

"THIS FRESH START IS
THE PERFECT ENTRY POINT
FOR NEWCOMERS."

And just as the cast members have been refreshed, this new universe gives the developers the opportunity to take a more experimental approach to the wider art direction. Bathed in vibrant, rich colours, the incredible backdrops are not only absolutely stunning but become the perfect canvas when fights start to

get bloody. And they *do* get bloody: the increased graphical fidelity makes for the most gruesome fatalities we've ever seen.

Don't let the number in the title fool you, this is nothing short of a proper evolution for the series, and it's

absolutely packed with exciting innovations that build on the action of its predecessor. The headlining addition here is the Kameo Fighter system, which introduces a second roster of characters who can dart in from the corner of the screen in the middle of combat to deliver quick assists and combo extenders. While you can only pick one partner to bring to a fight, each can deliver one of four separate moves depending on your button input, adding a fresh dimension to your moveset as you come up with innovative combinations.



Kiryu will do whatever it takes to protect his family, which means rocking the criminal underworld once again.

07

LIKE A DRAGON GAIDEN: THE MAN WHO ERASED HIS NAME

An old dog learns new tricks

F FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 9 NOV / **PUB** SEGA / **DEV** RYU GA GOTOKU STUDIO / **PLAYERS** 1

Thought we were done with all things *Like A Dragon*? Think again!

It turns out all you need to become a new man is a fashionable pair of specs. At the end of *Yakuza 6: The Song Of Life*, series stalwart Kiryu Kazuma went undercover to protect his loved ones, casting aside all his well-known monikers in favour of the pseudonym 'Joryu.' Well, no-one can accuse the ex-gangster of not keeping to a theme.

AGENT OF CHAOS

Naturally, Kiryu isn't left to live a quiet life. Seismic activity throughout the criminal underworld threatens to haul Kiryu out of hiding, so the nameless agent goes undercover before the aftershocks harm his

family. That's right, the former Dragon Of Dojima is back to throwing hands on Tokyo's mean streets.

Undercover Kiryu can still give wannabe gangsters a thorough beatdown with his familiar Yakuza fighting style, though he has new moves for larger crowds. Agent style offers more nimble movement for ducking and weaving between opposition on all sides, though that's far from all; in addition to the heavy-hitting punches and throws you'd expect, Kiryu has learnt to accessorise. First up is a gleaming blue tether that he can throw out to wrap up fighty bad guys, either tripping them up or hurling them into one another. This looks extremely fun and silly, but that's far from the only trick the Agent fighting style has to offer.

When you need to control the crowd, Kiryu can mumble into his earpiece and call down the drones. A fleet of whirring, consumer-grade bother bots will come to your aid to harass and distract a combative crowd so you can focus on thinning the herd. But sometimes the bad guys show up in force and you'll need something a little more... shall we say *drastic*.

Now, the style wouldn't be worthy of the 'Agent' name if you didn't have at least one impressive gadget disguised as a mundane object. It's a bad habit, but sometimes a hard man like Kiryu needs a cigarette to just take the edge off – especially when the ersatz item can be thrown into a horde of enemies with explosive results. Remember kids, smoking kills!



AVATAR: FRONTIERS OF PANDORA

Play the blues in Ubisoft's Far Cry-ish blockbuster adaptation

F FORMAT PS5 / ETA 7 DEC / PUB UBISOFT / DEV MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT / PLAYERS 1-2

Sometimes it's a little baffling to think that the Avatar movies are some of the most successful of all time. But for the people who love them enough to go to the cinema to see them over and over again, the appeal is the opportunity to immerse themselves in a world that's been carefully thought out by its maker. And that, surely, is something that every lover of videogames can appreciate. (Even those of us who are firmly in the 'but they're just tall Smurfs' camp.)

And we're far from having seen all of that world, creative director Magnus Jansén explains. Pandora is "nearly as big as Earth" – which is handy because it means this game can simply take place on a new continent, on the planet's western frontier, thereby avoiding treading on the giant blue toes of the movies. It also means all sorts of new sights, because this continent has its own native fauna and flora: giant, hammerheaded beetle-rhino hybrids, plants that disappear into themselves with a squelch when threatened, little creatures that fly around using a kind of lily-pod whirligig stuck on top of their head like in those Leonardo da Vinci

helicopter drawings. But there are also, of course, the aforementioned Smurfy aliens.

You play as a Na'vi who was trained by the villainous Resources Development Administration to fight like a human, before the RDA decided – as is the wont of these evil, colonising megacorps – to give up on the project and liquidise it. And all the alien students in it. The only way to avoid that fate, it seems, is to take a little cryo-nap. 15 years later, you wake up, just in time for the events of The Way Of Water, as the RDA returns for a fresh attempt at evil colonising.

TRAIN YOUR DRAGON

It's time to fight back, then, using the kind of guerrilla tactics that'll be familiar to anyone who has played a Far Cry. (It's probably not a coincidence that Jansén was creative director on Far Cry 3, the instalment that laid out the modern formula for that series.) There are outposts to take back and resources to harvest, although maybe not any towers to climb because Frontiers Of Pandora lets you tame an Ikran (the film's pterodactyl-dragon creatures) and fly around on your pet.

As you take on the RDA invaders, you're able to choose whether to

take a stealthy approach, using more traditional Na'vi weapons (spears, slings, and a bow), or to go in all guns blazing, using, well, guns. And when things get really serious and they pull out the big gunships to take you down, you can engage in Ikran dogfights that look like something out of the old Panzer Dragoon games, or take out their engines with a well-placed explosive arrow. Or you could always just reach for your dirty great rocket launcher and blast them out the sky with that. Bet they're regretting all that intensive combat training they gave you now. You can even take both approaches at once, by teaming up with a friend and their own customisable Na'vi avatar in co-op to defeat the megacorp.

While you play a specific Na'vi with a fixed personality, you can customise the look of your, ahem, avatar.

"TAME AN IKRAN (THE FILM'S PTERODACTYL-DRAGON CREATURES) AND FLY AROUND ON YOUR PET."



F **FORMAT** PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 25 AUG / **PUB** BANDAI NAMCO
DEV FROMSOFTWARE / **PLAYERS** MULTI



THE HOT 50

There'll be a mid-mission checkpoint, and "some" missions will feature supply points, but this is still going to be a real challenge.



vertical catapult enable you to cross – or retreat over – wide distances with glee. Which is just as well, really,

because *Fires Of Rubicon*'s world is tremendously imposing, even with soft strands of sunlight poking through the pipes and cables above. Platforms, tubes, cranes, and half-finished scaffolds poke out like the remains of a shattered steel rib cage, a smörgåsbord of stairs and elevators pockmarking the alien, industrial landscape as plumes of black smoke billow into the air.

Like everything FromSoftware does, of course, the presentation is tourniquet-tight, revealing only what the studio wants to reveal. The mech's movement looks fluid and responsive, though – fascinatingly so – and while it feels as though the one showcased here is one of the lighter, more agile varieties rather than a heavy hitter (weight is a stat, as ever), it strafes swiftly and confidently, boosting upwards and downwards as it explores the multiple strata that make up Grid 086, the facility we're trying to infiltrate.

1 Boost, strafe, and glide – or, you know, just chuck your enemies into the sky. Whatever works. **2** Different weapons will stagger different enemies more, so think about your loadout before you leave the hangar. **3** "Dynamic traversal" opens up mission maps to offer multiple challenges, battles, and access points, too. **4** AC veterans should be pleased, but some thought is being put into how to appeal to other FromSoftware fans as well.

And it sounds good, too. Meaty. Punishing. Gratifying. We've always been in awe of FromSoft's sensory soundscapes, but listen closely and above the pulsating beat of *Armored Core VI*'s soundtrack, you'll notice audio cues that we suspect (or should that be hope?) will keep you clued in on your enemy's movements, and maybe even telegraph upcoming attacks.

CORE BLIMEY

Customisation isn't only skin deep, either. Mixing up the cosmetics on your mech doesn't only affect your appearance but how you play, fight, and explore. If you've paid close attention to the blink-and-you'll-miss-it teasers thus far, you'll have

seen some of what's in store; we've seen the laser dagger, missile launchers, and a plasma missile, as well as caught a sneaky peek at the various battle-ready appendages that can be attached to your mech's head, arms, legs, and back. With further options available to refine what you pop into your generator, booster, and expansion slots, it certainly seems as though you'll be able to personalise your mech's loadout as meticulously as you do your Tarnished.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Ogura confirms that this is not an accident.



“Our aim is to create a new mech-action by the current FromSoftware, which combines the fundamental fan aspect of the [Armored Core] series with the design philosophy of recent FromSoftware games,” he explains, adding that the team started this journey by going back to the start and taking “a good look at the core concept of Armored Core and what made that series special”.

Quite how FromSoft’s newest titles will express the DNA of its older ones remains to be seen, of course. We’re informed that there’ll be a mid-mission checkpoint to help balm the pain of mid-mission-death, and “some” missions – which we’re translating to mean “not all” for now – will feature supply points that enable you to refresh your ammo and supplies in between scuffles. Tinkering and experimentation are encouraged to help players tailor their preferences and playstyles, but let there be no mistake, FromSoft’s signature challenge is still very much apparent here. We all watch on as the mech swiftly becomes overwhelmed, and

then ultimately defeated, by a swarm of angry, buzzing enemies.

FIRED UP

“Players need to think about which weapon will stagger the enemy, and which weapon to damage it with,” Ogura explains as the camera pans across a host of unsuspecting opponents stomping away on a

back and assessing the situation, players can take the time needed to observe, position, and then plan their attack.

We watch on as our demonstrative mech pirouettes smoothly across the screen, boosting in and out of harm’s way and switching seamlessly between long- and close-range combat

“PLAYERS NEED TO THINK ABOUT WHICH WEAPON WILL DAMAGE THE ENEMY, AND WHICH WEAPON TO DAMAGE IT WITH.”

distant platform. There’s a flash of a scanner – the orange hue recedes into the background (which we’re reliably informed may help identify weaknesses with tougher foes, too: you’re welcome) – and the outlines of mechanical foes glow on screen. “Assembly is a place where they can enjoy experimenting with their own unique co-ordinated effects.”

It’s here that Fires Of Rubicon’s delectable blend of action and strategy really shines. By holding

(albeit with a healthy emphasis on the latter). Successfully dodging incoming fire looks intensely satisfying, too, although it’s hard to imagine our own fingers pulling off the kind of split-second response we see on display here. With ACVI’s launch only about a month out, time will tell – but we’ll be reporting back next issue without Ogura’s guidance, for a test flight of our very own. But even now, we’re fired up and ready for blast off.



ASSASSIN'S CREED MIRAGE

We can't believe our eyes

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 12 OCT / **PUB** UBISOFT
DEV UBISOFT BORDEAUX / **PLAYERS** 1

Six years after Assassin's Creed became a fully-fledged historical RPG with Origins, the series is returning to its stealthy roots. While the latest instalment, Valhalla, wowed us with its incredible scale, there's a lot to look forward to in Mirage's promise of a more modernised take on the focussed design that made earlier entries so compelling.

Set during the golden age of Baghdad, everything we've seen from this dense stealth sandbox

instead sensibly opted to go all in on crafting a condensed, but highly detailed, urban playground. Described by the developers as comparable in size to Unity's Paris, this interpretation of Baghdad stands in stark contrast to the continent-size offerings that we've become accustomed to. It is still by no means tiny, however, and its complex layout is home to an intricate maze of tight streets and hidden alleyways perfectly suited for a silent assassin.

Your traversal around this environment is shaped by a distinct

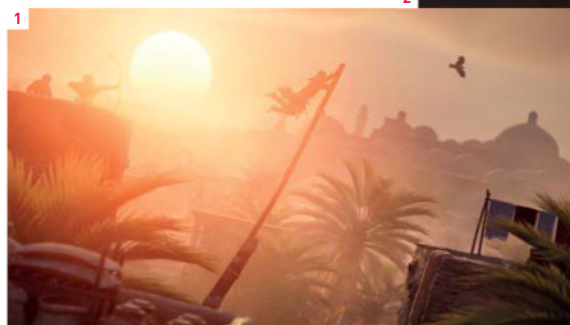
"UBISOFT HAS SENSIBLY OPTED TO GO ALL-IN ON CREATING A CONDENSED, BUT HIGHLY DETAILED, URBAN PLAYGROUND."

seems very much in line with what we remember loving when the series was at its peak. Missions are once again much more open-ended, featuring long chains of objectives that culminate in complex assassination sequences with many different paths to completion. The story, which charts the rise of Basim (who you might recognise from his appearance as a side-character in Valhalla) is also a major focus. As such, the RPG mechanics of recent titles have been scaled back, stopping the time-consuming level grinding and gear tweaking from getting in the way of the narrative.

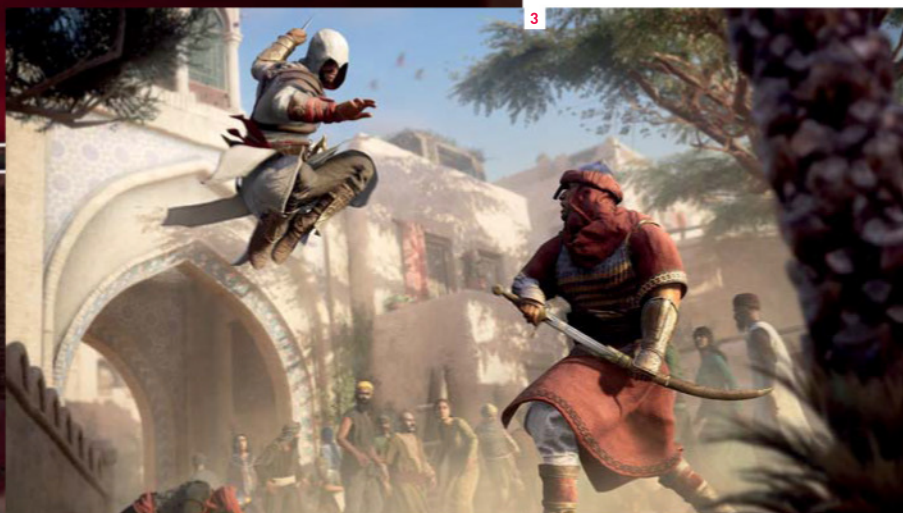
CITY LIMITS

While you might already have resigned yourself to pouring hundreds of hours into yet another massive open world, Ubisoft has

sense of verticality, something which was sorely missing from both the flat fields of Viking England and the sprawling Egyptian desert. There are plenty of opportunities for good, old-fashioned parkour here too and the entire movement system has been revamped to ensure that things feel as fluid as possible. Mechanically inspiration has been taken from all



2



1 Craving some nostalgia? An optional filter brings back the grey-blue palette of the first game. **2** We've missed the opportunity to get up high in recent Assassin's Creeds. **3** While the return of stealth is something we wholeheartedly welcome, we're glad the somewhat stilted combat of old has been left in the past.

across the series by blending the speed of recent games with the more precise animations seen in the likes of Unity and Brotherhood. Fan-favourite moves, like the ability to swing around corners or vault over waist-high walls, return and add acrobatic flair to your leaping.

HIDE AND SEEK

When you're not darting up the nearest wall, the bustling streets are perfect for quick bursts of social stealth. Mingling among the crowds can help you avoid the sight of patrolling guards, and Basim comes armed with an array of tools just in case things go awry. Smoke bombs can create an easy opportunity to give angry pursuers the slip, while gas traps and poison darts can be hastily deployed to take out entire groups of enemies at once. Basim's bird companion, Enkidu, is always on hand for useful air support, tagging nearby enemies and helping track down hard to find targets – just be careful to clear out any nearby archers before summoning him.

Although direct confrontation isn't encouraged, it is perhaps the biggest area where Mirage's devs seem eager to embrace the modern. The quick swordplay is particularly reminiscent of Valhalla's frenetic brawling, a welcome move given how poorly the stilted combat of the older games holds up today. It's a combo of old and new that we hope will take the series to new heights.

The snap of a twig, the catch of a branch as you pass – darkness lingers in these woods around Cauldron Lake.



ALAN WAKE 2

Telling twice as many tales

F FORMAT PS5 / ETA 17 OCT / PUB EPIC GAMES / DEV REMEDY ENTERTAINMENT / PLAYERS 1

The titular writer is plotting his return – though his story’s no longer his alone. The long-awaited sequel to Remedy’s recently remastered thriller follows two protagonists: Alan Wake (naturally); and FBI agent Saga Anderson.

However, these aren’t two separate campaigns available from the main menu. After certain events transpire early in the story, you can switch more or less freely between protagonists whenever you find a Break Room – just pop the lid off that Thermos and see how the other lead is doing on the flip side.

Co-director and lead writer Sam Lake tells us, “Even though [each protagonist’s story is] linear, you

still have a freedom to choose how you want to experience it.”

Co-director Kyle Rowley shares that his time working on *Cyberpunk 2077* informed his approach to this tale of two protagonists: “[I] learnt a lot about how you can give players agency in consuming story inside games [...] and that’s definitely something that was on my mind when we were coming up with some of the concepts related to the duality of [Alan Wake 2] – the fact that we have two playable characters in two realities with these two kinds of stories, and you being able to decide how you play through them.”

KNOW YOUR PLACE

Wake is trapped in the Dark Place for much of his story. This

nightmare realm takes the form of a twisted cityscape with terror lurking in every corner. Saga’s investigation in the American Pacific Northwest community of Bright Falls feels like a far cry from Alan’s nightmare, but darkness dwells here too.

Foliage and photogrammetry artist Ciara Creagh-Peschau is responsible for a large chunk of the greenery onscreen. They explain, “We’ve put a lot of time and effort into researching to make sure that we’re representing the Pacific Northwest really accurately, and with a lot of attention to detail. So this has been a lot of reading scientific surveys of the area, and learning a lot about the biology of the area [in addition to a research trip in 2019].”

"BRIGHT FALLS FEELS LIKE A FAR CRY FROM ALAN'S NIGHTMARE, BUT DARKNESS DWELLS HERE TOO."

Creagh-Peschau's favourite tree species is the vine maple, the snaking, grasping branches of which can be seen growing all around Cauldron Lake. Creagh-Peschau elaborates, "One thing that I quite like about these trees is that they behave very differently depending on where they grow. So this is the tree that I showed you before [...] but they actually only behave this way when they don't have much access to light and nutrients."

They go on to say, "The fact that [vine maples have] become quite synonymous with Cauldron Lake is kind of an interesting visual reinforcement that Cauldron Lake is being taken over by the Dark Presence – that there are these creepy, viney trees everywhere, that

actually only behave that way when they themselves don't have much access to light."

CHASING SHADOWS

While we love a bit of nature, Saga doesn't have the luxury of stopping to smell the roses; ritualistic killings have ripped through Bright Falls, and she's on the case. Principal narrative designer Molly Maloney is right there with her. Maloney, who previously worked at Telltale Games, tells us, "When I joined [Remedy], I was focussed specifically on Saga and investigation [...] she's a full-time job. She's a cool lady with a lot going on."

As a skilled investigator, Saga possesses a wide array of skills to bust this case wide open, like a Mind

Place she can visit where she can piece together evidence – which you can read more about in PLAY #29's massive feature.

It's a tale Remedy has worked hard to create. Maloney says, "A lot of [the challenge of working on this project] focussed around taking this really cool, crafted story that Sam [Lake] was working on, but adapting it for nonlinear [activity.] We have these cool hub spaces that you can explore around, acquire information in different orders – how to make that still feel satisfying, and have a crafted narrative experience that tells a story through it while giving you the freedom [to experience it at your own pace]. It's been a really fun challenge to work on, for sure – fun sometimes, tough sometimes!"



FORMAT PS5 / ETA EARLY 2024 / PUB SQUARE ENIX / DEV SQUARE ENIX / PLAYERS 1

64 | **PLAY**

Square Enix set itself an apparently impossible task: to remake one of its biggest series' best-loved entries. But instead of approaching the task with a wearying faithfulness, with the Remake series the developer is doing something different. Just how different it will be in the end remains to be seen, but Rebirth shows it's intent on keeping us guessing even as it retells a story many of us know well.

The series trades not only on the appeal of seeing beloved characters

from the '97 release looking miles better than even their Advent Children appearances, but also in how it deconstructs and remixes key events as it retells them. To put it another, slightly metaphorical way: sure, Cloud still has his Buster sword, but how you wield it is fundamentally different. The action no longer takes turns to transpire; instead every bout keeps you on your toes.

Let's quickly recap: the first part of this serious reimagining, Final Fantasy VII Remake, debuted in 2020. This initial chapter follows

events through the plate dropping on Sector 7, past some, uh, aggressive corporate restructuring at Shinra's headquarters, and into unknown territory as Big Bad Sephiroth first tips his horrifying hand. The base game ends with the party hitching a ride to Kalm. It's followed by post-game DLC Episode Intermission, which tells an all-new side story centring on Materia hunter Yuffie. She's joined by an original character, Sonon, who calls the pint-sized ninja prodigy 'boss.' The pair's acrobatic joint attacks offer an early taste of how combat »

“DECONSTRUCTS AND
REMIXES KEY EVENTS AS
IT RETELLS THEM.”

THE HOT 50



» will be reinvented for a second time in Rebirth.

STRIKING OUT

Remake saw party members drift in and out of your lineup, the full squad largely being kept separate until a climactic showdown. In Rebirth, on the other hand, it seems you're set to enjoy the full breadth of your party's abilities from early on.

As Cloud explores lush, more open-ended areas throughout Rebirth, his party has his back. In addition to the usual suspects, escaped lab experiment Red XIII provides smarts plus fighting might. An often-alooof animal companion, in a fight he can rip the opposition to threads with a spinning flurry of claw strikes. When he's paired with Yuffie in a new team-up attack, your foes won't know what hit them.

The rest of the Midgar squad have a few new tricks up their sleeves too.

1 Red XIII enjoys a *very* late introduction in Remake, but in Rebirth he's a fully fledged party member who packs plenty of punch. **2** Don't let these lush fronds fool you – the planet, Gaia, is dying. How will the Shinra corporation add insult to injury? **3** Rebirth raises lots of questions. If its version of Elena is anything like her original loudmouthed incarnation, maybe she'll let slip some answers. **4** On top of new party members, team-up attacks could be a game-changer. **5** Aerith is not just a flower girl. Does she know more about what's happening than she lets on?

Barret and Cloud gang up on the opposition with a devastating combination of bullets and blades, but it's not just the lads who've learned the value of team synergy. In a particularly impressive pairing, magic user Aerith casts a semi-physical dome that Tifa then darts around to deliver devastating damage on all sides. As flashy as these teamups are, the gang may yet meet their match, in the shape of

Elena. Joking aside, when the gang are forced to go a few rounds with the Turks' loudmouthed new recruit plus the returning Rude, Elena gives as good as she gets, even appearing to have them on the back foot... though she's far from the only boss who'll challenge you.

ASKING QUESTIONS

Decisive action aside, Rebirth raises plenty of questions too. Like, what



THE HOT 50

towards pulling the rug out from under them.

PARTS UNKNOWN

As we flash back to that fateful event, we see the iconic moment when a young Tifa squares off against Sephiroth and Rebirth offers yet another complicated nugget to chew on. As the silver-haired villain slices Tifa with his impossibly long blade, it looks bad but we know she makes it out alive in the end – or does she?

Sephiroth intones, “You know that I killed her. So, who is she?” Maybe it’s just villainous mind games, maybe Sephiroth has in fact peeked at an alternate timeline, or maybe it’s Maybelline – uh, we mean, maybe it’s something altogether stranger.

The plot thickens when we consider how Rebirth recreates a certain dangerous voyage. Staring down a particularly gnarly incarnation of Jenova, Sephiroth plants another seed of doubt, describing the fiend before the party, “They say she’s a monster: that she can peer inside you, into

“REBIRTH’S DEVELOPERS APPEAR INTENT ON KEEPING US GUESSING ABOUT HOW THINGS WILL PLAY OUT THIS GO-AROUND.”

highly suspect, and whether it’s simply Shinra attempting to take control of the narrative or even a glimpse of an alternate timeline remains to be determined.

It’s far from the only big question mark hanging over Cloud and company. As the party ventures beyond Midgar, we hear Tifa having a quiet word with Aerith. The initial Remake was in part notable for how it expands on the dynamic between these two badass ladies, and Rebirth seems pitched to build upon that foundation – via the steady unravelling of their mutual bestie.

Tifa asks tentatively, “I was wondering – what’s Cloud been doing these past five years? Where’s he been?”

Aerith responds, “And you’re... asking me this?”

“This is gonna sound crazy,” Tifa continues, “But as far as I know, Cloud was never in Nibelheim five years ago.”

Fans of the original 1997 game already have the answer to this question along with many others surrounding the Nibelheim incident, but Rebirth is already gesturing

the very depths of your soul; that she can become those you hate, those you fear, those you love.”

We can’t yet say exactly what that means for Tifa or anyone else, but one thing we *can* be certain about is that evil has worn many faces throughout Final Fantasy VII – and Rebirth’s developers appear intent on keeping us guessing about how that will play out this go-around until the last possible moment.

And that’s all without so much as whispering about how throughout the Remake series the devs seem intent to refactor characters from the wider Compilation Of Final Fantasy VII canon back into the mix. For instance, the Tsviets Weiss and Nero originally appeared in Dirge Of Cerberus on PS2, and both make surprising appearances in expanded PS5 rerelease Final Fantasy VII Remake Intergrade. It’s definitely a bold choice to unspool such a beloved narrative this way, placing series newbies and veterans in the same boat of not having a clear idea of how it’s all going to shake out. We just hope Square Enix sticks the landing for all that ambition.

was that news report about? Detailing the aftermath of an apparently natural disaster within Midgar, we see Barret, Tifa, Red XIII, and Aerith gurneyed away by Shinra personnel. The Shinra Broadcasting Service suggests they were found amid the wreckage of the expressway, and claims that the destruction was the result of a tornado ripping through Sectors 0, 1, and 2. This story is, of course,



THE HOT 50

01

MARVEL'S SPIDER- MAN 2

FORMAT PS5 / ETA 20 OCT / PUB SONY / DEV INSOMNIAC GAMES / PLAYERS 1

No chance that this series will Peter out

068 | PLAY

gamesradar.com/playmag



THE HOT 50

01

MARVEL'S SPIDER- MAN 2

FORMAT PS5 / ETA 20 OCT / PUB SONY / DEV INSOMNIAC GAMES / PLAYERS 1

No chance that this series will Peter out

068 | PLAY

gamesradar.com/playmag



THE HOT 50

01

MARVEL'S SPIDER- MAN 2

FORMAT PS5 / ETA 20 OCT / PUB SONY / DEV INSOMNIAC GAMES / PLAYERS 1

No chance that this series will Peter out

068 | PLAY

gamesradar.com/playmag

W

ell, it looks like this sequel will give you everything you might possibly want. Classic

Spidey Peter Parker? You got it! Modern Spidey Miles Morales? You got it! New villains? You got it! Your own spider-powers in real life, so you can fight crime and instantly web-sling your way out of awkward conversations? You g— well, you can't have everything.

Peter was present in Miles' game, but only through phone calls, recorded messages, and the occasional hologram. In his role »



1



2

» as Spider-mentor, he'd left training simulations and challenges across the city for Miles to hone his skills on. In this full-blown sequel, however, Peter has returned to New Yoik, and this time will be working alongside the young(er) hero to kick evil backsides.

This does *not* mean multiplayer, though. Spider-Man remains a

between them were already well established in previous games, but their moves and abilities have now been further expanded.

Miles, in his own PS5 launch title, impressed us with his invisibility and electrical powers – he can give enemies a huge shock they never see coming (like the price of the DualSense Edge controller, only less

“THIS TIME YOU PLAY AS BOTH SPIDER-MEN, SWITCHING BETWEEN PETER AND MILES AT PREDETERMINED MOMENTS IN THE STORY.”

single-player experience, the potential implications of which we'll speculate about later. For now, we'll tell you that in a practical sense this means switching between Peter and Miles at predetermined moments in the story. While you're taking bites out of the Big Apple in free roam, though, you'll be able to switch between the two at will. Differences

painful). One new gadget for him is the Web Grabber, which allows him to pull multiple enemies together into one spot for an attack. He can also now unleash the Thunder Burst, an area-of-effect ground-based attack. Chain Lightning sounds pretty darn handy too, as it's able to travel between multiple nearby enemies. Those all add up to plenty



3

1 This treacle quite literally hits different. Petey's got some more oomph. **2** Miles has plenty of stealth tricks beyond being able to temporarily turn invisible (though it certainly does help). **3** On top of the wardrobe clash, Miles and the grouchy neighbourhood Spider-Man have distinct abilities to set them apart.

of new tricks for this Spider-Man to further differentiate him from the original friendly neighbourhood webhead. But he's not the only one who's had some upgrades...

BACK IN BLACK

Oh yeah, *Peter Parker has the symbiote suit!* It's unclear how far into the story he gains it – at one point during the footage, Miles expresses surprise at Peter's altered appearance – but this won't be a brief power trip snatched away almost as soon as it's given. The goopy symbiote transforms Peter's abilities and style almost completely compared to his first adventure. Not only are there new (and pretty brutal) takedowns, tendrils shoot out to smack, grab, and slam Spidey's foes. Despite the extra power, you'll still need to make use



of the new parry system for certain enemies, though.

As the two Spideys are so different, the two have individual skill trees, but there's also a shared skill tree as they share some abilities and gadgets (such as the Web Line, great for stealth as you create a path to creep around unseen above your enemies).

True to the source material, the symbiote seeps into Peter's personality. In most interpretations, Peter Parker is well-known for smart comebacks, cheesy jokes, and ironic small talk in inappropriate situations. With the symbiote latched on, however, he's laser-focused on the task at hand at all times, and has no time for anything else. We see this catch Miles off guard more than once, as he becomes increasingly concerned about his friend's state of mind. It's supported by a typically fantastic performance from Yuri Lowenthal, who plays this version of the

character with a mixture of aggression and unnaturally elated excitement. This is most definitely *not* the sanguine Peter Parker we saw in the first game.

VENOM SIXTY FOUR

We've known for a while now that Venom will be in the game. So does this mean that Peter will go full-blown villain and transform into the toothy beast? A Miles/Peter confrontation seems inevitable... but there are other ways it could go. While we'll eat our Spider-Man-branded hat if this doesn't end up with Miles having to go web-to-tentacle with Peter at some point, that doesn't necessarily mean that we're going to see Venom Parker.

Dipping our toes into the murky waters of speculation, we look to the comics for justification.

There's plenty of precedent for Peter Parker bonding with the

symbiote, both willingly and unwillingly. In a few storylines, he does become downright villainous. However, multiple characters have carried the name Venom, and there are – in the comics, at least – even canonically multiple symbiotes.

Peter might eventually rid himself of the parasite (which could be where the revised Iron Spider suit comes in, to replicate some of his new moves sans the sludge) – which could latch onto somebody else, who in turn becomes the Venom we know and love. All *Insomniac* is saying is it's not Eddie Brock, the first Venom in comics. Could it be Harry Osborn, who we've seen gripped by the goop in stasis due to this sickness? Or Kraven The Hunter, embracing something otherworldly to become an even greater predator? Or maybe Mysterio will enter the scene, and it'll all have been a smoke-and-mirrors ruse? (Mysty fans, don't get your hopes up).

Only time will tell, but if the first game is anything to go by, *Insomniac* loves to add little twists to the beats Spidey-fans already know, so don't assume things will





1

be simple. There's even comics precedent for Miles bonding with the symbiote (though at this point who hasn't?). The path of bubbly soup powers never did run smooth.

WE'VE GOT A KRAVEN

Outside of the reveal trailer, we've yet to see Venom in action, which is partly why his true identity remains a mystery. We have had a brief

important Connors will be to the story is yet unclear. So far it's Kraven who seems to form the backbone of the tale as one of the main villains. And New York City with its supervillains and superheroes to match them could prove the ultimate hunting ground for him and his minions.

If you only know Marvel from the MCU and videogames, chances are

"KRAVEN SEEMS TO BE ONE OF THE MAIN VILLAINS, AND NEW YORK CITY COULD PROVE THE ULTIMATE HUNTING GROUND FOR HIM."

glimpse of Dr Curtis Connors, AKA Lizard (as teased at the end of Miles Morales), as he tussles with Miles in the river. Other than the fact he may hold the cure for Harry Osborn's sickness – yet another reason Peter is so single-minded, as he'd do anything for his old friend – how

you know little to nothing about this fella (although, probably not coincidentally, he's getting his own movie in October). He's sort of like a human version of the Predator, obsessed with hunting and killing the most challenging prey he can find, hence his tracking and chasing

Lizard. In doing so, he'll become top of the food chain himself, and he isn't averse to using some tricks to do it – such as a herbal drink that gifts him with super-strength (in the original comics). It's easy to imagine a symbiote-powered Spider-Man also catching his attention as worthy prey.

Sony's been surprisingly generous with story details, although it's likely that it's holding back even more than we suspect. What of all the in-between moments, though? The time exploring New York City when you're darting between skyscrapers at your own pace looking for secrets and side-missions? As we've already said, you can switch between Spideys whenever you like. But there's even more good news.

THE BIGGER APPLE

For starters, the sleep-deprived city that you'll be swinging around is significantly larger than the one



3



4

- 1 "How dare you say you don't like my enormous hairy collar? How *dare* you?"
 2 Miles doesn't take kindly to people cruising without a valid jet ski licence.
 3 We know he's in the game, but when? How? Who? We need to know! 4 Ganke is here in droid form to mediate Miles and Peter's wardrobe clash.



you've fought crime in before. While the first games limited you to Manhattan Island, you'll now also be able to swing all the way over into Brooklyn and Queens. An already large map is now going to be hee-yooge, so it's just as well there's a new way to get around.

Insomniac has already absolutely nailed the feeling of web-slinging your way through the city, making the simple act of getting from A to B a pleasure. Impossible to improve upon – or so we thought. Now both Miles and Peter enjoy the addition of

Web Wings to their suits, allowing them to fly through the air as – we're sorry to tell you this – a small number of spider species can. You can use wind tunnels to give yourself a boost, allowing for more variety and speed than ever as you hurtle through the air on your way to do something heroic.

Unlikely as it seems, things are going to look better than ever too. Insomniac promises we'll enjoy environments that are "richer, denser, and packed with details from particles to improved

textures", as well as improved lighting and further use of the DualSense haptics. Sounds like something destined to be used to show off your PS5 to your friends.

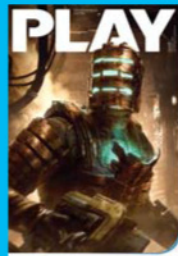
Let's wind up by touching again on the single-player nature of the game. Much of the reason for this is probably technical, with a bit of logistics thrown in. Multiplayer would wrest control of the carefully curated chase sequences away from Insomniac, and, let's face it, two people sharing the same incredibly detailed open world would probably make your PS5 cry. Also, you wouldn't want two players when the seemingly inevitable Miles-Peter fight happens, would you?

It does raise questions about the various mysteries of the story, though. So does one of them disappear from the story for a while for some reason? Could it even come to pass that there's just one Spider-Man left standing when the credits roll? Just a few months until we find out... and we can't wait. ■

READER
OFFER

SUBSCRIBE TO **PLAY**

AND ENJOY *GREAT SAVINGS* AND THESE BENEFITS!



EXCLUSIVE
SUBSCRIBER
COVERS



- Brilliant value – save money on the cover price
- **Never miss an issue** → **Delivered direct to your door**
- Get exclusive subscriber-only covers

SUBSCRIBE TODAY AND GET A JOBY MAGNETIC WIRELESS CHARGER WORTH £29.95, WITH EVERY PRINT OR BUNDLE SUBSCRIPTION.

- Qi wireless charging and MagSafe-compatible.
- An ultra-slim design ideal for home, office, or on the go.
- **Aluminium body allows good heat dissipation.** → Easy to use – simply put your smartphone on the charger disc, no need to plug in to charge!



ANNUAL PRINT EDITION



£36.50

Every six months

13 issues of **PLAY** in print
over 12 months

SAVE 19%

ANNUAL PRINT & DIGITAL



£44

Every six months

13 issues of **PLAY** over 12
months in print and digital

SAVE 38%

ANNUAL DIGITAL EDITION



£17

Every six months

13 issues of **PLAY** in digital
over the course of the year

SAVE 41%

<http://www.magazinesdirect.com/POM/B93G>

Or telephone **0330 333 1113** and quote **B93G**

TERMS & CONDITIONS Offer closes 31/8/2023. Offer open to new UK subscribers only. Pricing is guaranteed for the first 12 months and we will notify you in advance of any price changes. Please allow up to six weeks for delivery of your first subscription issue (up to eight weeks overseas). Your gift will be delivered separately within 60 days after your first payment has cleared. Gifts only available to subscribers on the UK mainland. Gift not available with a digital subscription. The full subscription rate is for 12 months (13 issues) and includes postage and packaging. If the magazine ordered changes frequency per annum, we will honour the number of issues paid for, not the term of the subscription. For full terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/terms. For enquiries please call: +44 (0) 330 333 1113. Lines are open Monday- Friday 9am- 5pm UK Time or e-mail: help@magazinesdirect.com. Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than a national landline call, and may be included in your phone provider's call bundle.



EVERY 46 MINUTES

SOMEONE IS DIAGNOSED WITH A

BRAIN TUMOUR.

Work with us to accelerate a cure

Brain tumours affect more than 11,000 people every year and survival rates are among the lowest of all cancers. We need your support to help us get closer to defeating brain tumours.

Text DEFEAT5 to 70507 to donate £5, please help us to find a cure.

thebraintumourcharity.org

Reviews



"YOU WAKE
AFTER YOUR
OWN MURDER."

092 Ghost Trick:
Phantom Detective



078 Final Fantasy XVI

With a character-action focus, it's Devil May Clive

HIGHLIGHTS

FINAL FANTASY XVI **078** | DIABLO IV **084** | SYNAPSE **086** | CRIME BOSS: ROCKAY CITY **088** | CRASH TEAM RUMBLE **089** | THE LEGEND OF HEROES: TRAILS INTO REVERIE **090** | GHOST TRICK: PHANTOM DETECTIVE **092** | DORDOGNE **094** | OXENFREE II: LOST SIGNALS **095** | F1 23 **096** | C-SMASH VRS **098** | ROGUE LEGACY 2 **099**

Valisthea is stunning, and filled with classic beasts to whack.

Final Fantasy XVI

Shattering the crystalware



INFO

FORMAT PS5

PRICE £64.99

ETA Out now

PUB Square Enix

DEV Creative
Business Unit III

PLAYERS 1

LENGTH 45-50+ hrs

ACCESSIBILITY

Customisable subtitles; story mode; visualisation toggle for in-game sounds; customisable camera (including sensitivity and targeting assists)

Numbered Final Fantasy games don't come around often, and the last few single-player ones have been – let's be honest – a bit of a letdown. But if those suffered from the poison of development hell and feature creep, then FFXVI has 99 antidotes stocked to cure those ails. Respecting the series' history, it moves Final Fantasy forward with twitchy, satisfying real-time combat and impressive performance-led storytelling.

The way FFXVI builds on the RPG behemoth's legacy is like poetry – it often rhymes. From the map-heavy politicking of Final Fantasy XII to the way the Mothercrystals forming the backbone of Valishea's geopolitical climate are explicitly related to the elements that make up the world (and an encroaching blight) like in Final Fantasy V, there's no mistaking the family resemblance. Yet FFXVI is also a game where you can have your doggo companion knock an enemy spinning into the air for you to teleport-dash up to and slam back into the ground with a plunging sword strike.

CLASH OF THE TITANS

But the pixel-DNA is inescapable. There's a moment in Final Fantasy IV when hero Cecil arrives in a village of summoners and, tricked by the corrupt king he serves, reduces it to cinders. Encountering a young survivor, he tries to save her only to learn he's responsible for the death of her mother. The girl loses control, summoning Titan, who levels the area, deforming the overworld and upending the valley with impassable chunks of rock. FFXVI's opening echoes this, beginning in medias res with protagonist Clive thrown into the midst of a crumbling landscape as Shiva and Titan level a battlefield around him. His Bearer assassin squad, The Bastards, are tasked with taking the ice queen's head. What was once represented in the abstract by sprites on a very-much-not-to-scale map is now fully realised, throwing us in the middle of jaw-dropping action again and again.

This world-shaking start is just the tip of the Diamond Dust iceberg. The level of detail rendered on screen, especially in regards to the environments and particle-heavy special moves, is so good you





■ Respecting the series' history, this turning of the page moves the series forward with twitchy, satisfying real-time combat. ■



1



almost doubt you're playing it. That's true in quieter moments too, as Clive walks through a lush forest or sunny desert market town; it's like you're looking at a tech demo doomed never to be released except, well, here it is.

NOW FREEZE

But back to Shiva's head. Or, at least, the head of her Dominant, the human in whom the powerful god-like Eikon resides. In Valisthea, gigantic Mothercrystals dot the land, bestowing magic on its inhabitants through mined crystal shards, while also imparting inherent magical power to humans known as Dominants and Bearers. Many wars – Clive's in the middle of one – have been fought over the crystals, countries having become reliant on their energy for things as simple as freezing food or stoking the flames of smithies. However, along the way every country managed to put their differences aside to agree that all Bearers are *legally slaves*, to be branded on their faces, their magical gift to be put to work until they become a literal husk, bled dry of their gifted aether. Fair warning: depictions of this are grim, evoking slave trade imagery – FFXVI constantly hammers home how disgusting the state of affairs is.

Dominants, meanwhile, sometimes enjoy high status due to their earth-shattering power, but not always. Shiva's Dominant was not so lucky (in the Iron Kingdom, which controls her, crystal use is seen as sinful), and Clive has been forced to set his sights on her.

Valisthea is a world that feels lived-in, with a rich history – and one that's understandable despite all the proper nouns. To help you get to grips with it there's an intuitive lore system, including a glossary that can be accessed at any moment with a press of the touchpad. It's not the only way you're able to dive into the world's minutiae, but it definitely helps to be able to check referenced conflicts or important characters, especially as everything's updated with new entries to reflect the story, which spans many years. Further in, you even get a strategic map that shows where each dominion's forces are.

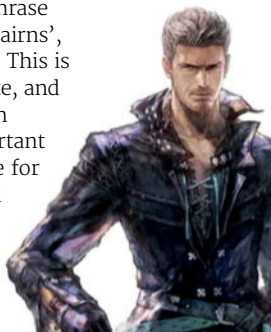
But you're not just sniffing tomes. History is made in front of you throughout the story, and it's an immediately grittier one than past entries. The constant bloody murder is a lot more in-your-face. Game Of Thrones' influence is obvious, but this game never goes as far as the HBO hit, which feels for the better. (There are some creepy intimate moments of naked bodies entangling, and a couple of genuinely romantic smooches to boot.)

Terrific performances carry it, and we don't just mean a delightful selection of UK accents (using appropriate slang and regional turns of phrase too – you've got 'nowts', 'proper jobs', 'bairns', 'shites', and more, all expertly deployed). This is the most performance-focussed FF to date, and that feels baked in at the script level, with glances and gestures often being as important as what characters say. Room's also made for you to get to know your companions and the supporting cast through downtime and banter beyond life-or-death fights, and there are moments of real grief.

Clive's had his fair share. He wasn't always an enslaved assassin; once, he

You've got 'nowts', 'proper jobs', 'bairns', 'shites', and more, all expertly deployed.

Cid shows Clive a new path forward once he's freed from his shackles, though given he's so charming, we'd follow him anywhere.



Expect plenty of nattering about fantasy stuff, but the story is always a pleasure.

would have enjoyed pride of place as a pin on any good tactician's map. The son of the late Grand Archduke of the Duchy Of Rosaria, he's haunted by memories of the night the Duchy fell into ruin and his younger brother Joshua,

Dominant of Phoenix, died in front of him at the hands of Ifrit, a second fire Eikon who many believe should not exist. His prowess in combat (as he was bequeathed

just a portion of the Phoenix's power to act as its protector) earned him a place in servitude to the Holy Empire Of Sanbreque, the country which swooped in to claim Rosaria's lands in the wake of the disaster.

When his Shiva-slaying mission goes wrong, Clive is liberated by Cid The Outlaw, leader of a group determined to change the crystal-choked world. Drawn into such a noble cause, Clive has a chance to move on, and use his Phoenix-gifted powers for something greater... if ideas of revenge don't consume him entirely.

PHOENIX RIGHT

Phoenix's power means Clive is fun to control as soon as you get your mitts on the hilt of his blade, with only his starting suite of skills (you'll be rocking many more by the RPG's end). But throughout, the fundamentals remain the same. You whack enemies with Ⓐ, and blast them with magic using Ⓐ. Tapping Ⓐ performs a dodge, and if you press it at the right time, it gives you an opening into a counter-attack, while attacking against an attack can parry, slowing down time while giving you a window to stick 'em with the pointy end. Flashy

moves abound too – hold Ⓐ to use special abilities depending on your selected Eikon (like area-of-effect spin-slashes and launching uppercuts, among many others), and Ⓢ taps activate Eikonic feats.

Each feat fundamentally alters the pace of play. In Phoenix's case it's a short teleport that puts you right up in a foe's business to then slash your way out of; Garuda's grabs a far-off enemy and pulls them towards you, flipping you into the air for a followup air combo if they're heavy; Bahamut's sees you charge up a superpowered mana blast, the meter filling more quickly as you dodge deftly. Throughout the story you'll attune to more of these big beasts to harness their power, and with three equipable at once (quick to toggle between mid-mash) there's plenty of room for fun combinations. With enough ability points you can even 'master' each ability, making it possible to apply them to any Eikon so you can create a unique palette of powers.

Essentially, it'd be fair to pitch FFXVI as, 'What if Devil May Cry also had open world sections between levels?' Much has been made of combat director Ryota Suzuki's involvement in FFXVI – he joined hot off the heels of Devil May Cry V. PlatinumGames, known for its character action titles, has also been involved, as has the Kingdom Hearts team. Getting real-time combat right has clearly been a priority for the creators of this new entry, and it really shows in practice, though at times it's a little hard to get away from comparing it to its new action combat peers.

Not only does spellslinging essentially work like Dante's pistols (being chargeable to boot), you've got a Stinger-like



- 1 Eikonic feats can change the pace of combat, whether that's by enabling you to zip around or forcing you to take the time to charge up a big hit.
- 2 You'll find yourself tilting the stick to walk just to take in the gorgeous environments.
- 3 See some big, shiny lines like these? You'd better get out of the way of them, sharpish.

lunge, an enemy-hopping stomp, an airborne cleave, a touchpad button taunt, and eventually, a power-boosting Devil Trigger (called a Limit Break here). Replay main levels in arcade mode and you're even graded on parts of the level with a letter-based ranking right the way up to 'S'. Combos are kept track of, with names of moves flashing up on screen as you chain hits together.

As you gain access to more powerful Eikonic skills, the complexity in how they interact increases (the final one even has a special move for cancelling into other attacks mid-animation). You could use Titan's block at the last moment and unleash rocky counters, then flip your foe into the air with Phoenix's wing before bringing the thunder as Ramuh. While most AI party members don't follow commands (there's no flicking between them like in FFXVII Remake), your faithful wolf companion Torgal does, his snips and launchers initiated via the D-pad, adding to your combo – simple, but additive.

The problem comes when you realise that though it's far from basic, the combat lacks the depth to equal its most obvious point of comparison. It

makes sense in the context of an RPG, but nonetheless it can feel like a layer of complexity is just out of reach. While combos exist in a fashion, as described, you're also not doing much more than mashing **Ⓐ** and throwing out big moves, and though challenging fights require more thought (as do the post-game's harder modes), you're still mostly doing the same few things. Most goons can simply be whaled on while you break their will meters in order to stun them, and then do it again. It just isn't that deep, and where it could be, it doesn't incentivise you to roll up the sleeves of your leather jacket.

Bosses do become more taxing, as you have to react to their screen-filling attacks. There's a touch of Final Fantasy XIV to these moments (the games share some members of their dev teams), tasking you with dodging between a bunch of telegraphed strikes at once like you would in the MMORPG. QTE clashes, too, are well-

implemented, acting like quick palate cleansers between phases of a fight à la Yakuza rather than taking away control.

Larger, Eikonic fights are spectacular to behold, but suffer from similar problems, though it's pleasing that, when you're in control of these huge beasts, they're just as responsive as Clive with much of his moveset intact – though beefed up.

WORLD WALKER

Despite the pre-release insistence that FFXVI isn't open world... well, it kind of is. You do select where you want to go from a big map, with mainline, mostly linear levels having a distinct red icon. However the blue icons take you to massive, open regions. There are four in total, all stuffed with enemies and, eventually, side-quests to tackle (Not least of all Hunts, special enemies you must track down by following clues before bashing into submission).

The regions open up over time, with routes through being

As you gain more powerful Eikonic skills, the complexity in how they interact increases.

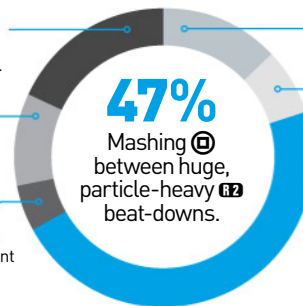
THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: FINAL FANTASY XVI

18% Hitting ↑ to use a potion, and never running out.

10% Pulling up Active Time Lore to remember who that fella is.

5% The crystals are an 'inconvenient truth'? Subtle oil metaphor.



13% Dodging at just the right moment, and feeling great.

7% Making sure Gav, our favourite fantasy Geordie, is protected at all costs.

FRIENDS & ENEMIES



GAV

Cid's best scout, he's vital to Clive's ongoing missions, and a bit of a cheeky chappy.



LADY CHARON

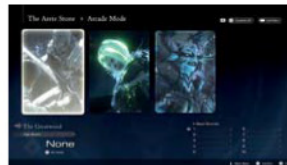
This legendary merchant can get you anything, but won't put up with any nonsense.



NEKTAR

This moogles craves blood. Sate him by tracking the enemies on his Hunt Board.

LOVING/HATING



REPLAY THEATRE

Across arcade and Replay modes, you can revisit a level any time you want. Remember when this was the norm? Bliss.



WHACK HAPPY

Combat is fun, but does become a bit of a slog without the variation to match this game's obvious peer Devil May Cry.

HOW TO... GET THE CHOCOBO



Side-quests are marked with green icons, but keep an eye out for ones with a '+' instead of a '?' as they unlock upgrades. The first and most interesting happens after your second story visit to Martha's Rest, as you'll nab a chocobo for your troubles, making travelling a lot faster.

SECOND OPINION FEASTING FANGIRL



It may not be deep, but I enjoy Final Fantasy's take on character action. Besides Clive and his spectacular particle-effect-laden attacks, I also have fun with chilly co-lead Jill and winged villainess Benedikta, though I feel the latter's arc concludes a bit too early. The wider cast is full of memorable turns too – not to mention some fantastic Geordie accents. Howay, Gav! **Jess Kinghorn**



4 As you'd expect from Square Enix, the cutscenes are real attention-grabbers.

5 Ifrit is big, but many foes are bigger. 6 Hunts introduce challenging twists on familiar enemy types – and there are a lot to track down!



blocked off at first, but the areas are fully linked eventually. There's gorgeous environmental variation, and chests to find off the beaten path (as well as Chronolith stone slabs that open up Eikon-specific challenges). Combined, they feel as expansive as FFXV's open world, and offer more lively details.

Cue the FF victory jingle, then? It more than deserves a toot. Despite nitpicking about combat, the implementation feels like a well-judged first-step into proper action combat; the story is gripping and one of the best-delivered in the series (though seeing more events from the perspectives of other characters throughout the conflict would have been welcome); and it's a gorgeous world to look at, right down to the parts you trek through.

And yet it's almost too cleanly put together. The world might be packed with mystery, but not much of what you're able to interact with is. What you see is what you get, your modes of play defined from the outset. Don't expect much in the way of hidden rooms, dungeons, or summons; there's not even a weird card game to lose hours to and no little quests for collectables other than grabbing generic gear. It's a shame for a series defined in part by its quirkier, optional moments. FFXVI is an expansive, beautiful, and whack-happy adventure but, story twists aside, it delivers what you expect, and not much beyond. It's a refreshing change for the series, yes, and boy does it taste sweet going down, but next time let's down some stranger juice too, eh?



New numbered FFs are good again. Stunning to look at, with new, punchy combat, and a great yarn, it is, if anything, too focussed, lacking a bit of the weird. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**

9

PLAY

There are certain spots where you can pause to take in the grim majesty of your surroundings.

ALABASTER MONASTERY

Diablo IV

There's a hell of a loot going on around here

Demonic mother figure Lilith is threatening the world, corrupting its inhabitants while commanding an army of supernatural creatures. Hang on, didn't we review *Midnight Suns* already? But this is completely different, of course, and not only because the imperilled world is Sanctuary rather than Earth. Prepare yourself for an epic adventure, and more costume changes than your favourite sketch show.

Diablo, in case you didn't know, popularised the idea of trawling through dungeons for widely varied loot. 25 years or so later the loot is shinier, but the fundamental idea is the same: to open chests and kill enemies on a quest for better and better kit which, thanks to the Americanised naming, includes an item that is genuinely called Magic Pants (although we greatly appreciate finding a pair of Sturdy Pants, too).

Before that, though, you need to create your character. Choosing from the Rogue, Sorcerer, Druid, Barbarian, and Necromancer classes, you can then fiddle with their appearance before starting your quest. Pick wisely; you can make multiple characters, but they don't share items or XP, so each needs to be levelled up separately.

Diablo IV is a good-looking game, but we can't help but feel maybe it *could* do with a bit of razing and starting again. There's an oppressive



INFO

FORMAT PS5 (reviewed), PS4

PRICE £69.99

ETA Out now

PUB Blizzard Entertainment

DEV Blizzard Entertainment

PLAYERS 1-4

LENGTH 25-35 hrs (campaign)

ACCESSIBILITY Colourblind modes; font scaling and colour options; screen reader; text to speech options; voice chat transcription; swap stick functions; screen shake on/off; reduce strobing; character highlight options; adjustable dead zones; crossplay on/off; controls are customisable

atmosphere everywhere, everybody seems to be pretty miserable, and everything you encounter outside of the towns wants to kill you. Still, it's up to us to save this glum world, so we do our duty.

BARNEY TROUBLE

We start as a druid (who we name Barney), and the further we progress, the clearer it becomes that the skill customisation is truly impressive. By the end of the campaign we're relying heavily on lightning and poison attacks, but could just as easily have commanded animal pals to aid us while fighting more often as a werewolf, or raised the very earth to trap and damage our enemies. This level of control

gives us a powerful sense of ownership over our character, and our character's success.

Although areas of the world and certain activities are level-gated, we're never at a loss for something new to do during the campaign. There are plenty of side-quests, public events to stumble upon, and optional dungeons and mini-dungeons to conquer. Quality writing and acting support the experience, rounding off a time-heavy but constantly engaging adventure.

There's a lot to love despite the intentional gloominess of the setting, but combat firmly prevents Diablo IV from crossing into the land of true greatness. It isn't *terrible* – that would kill the experience outright, given

■ The further we get, the clearer it is that the skill customisation is truly impressive. ■

THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: **DIABLO IV**

17% Crawling through dungeons on the hunt for sweet, sweet loot.

14% Crawling through the overworld on the hunt for sweet, sweet loot.

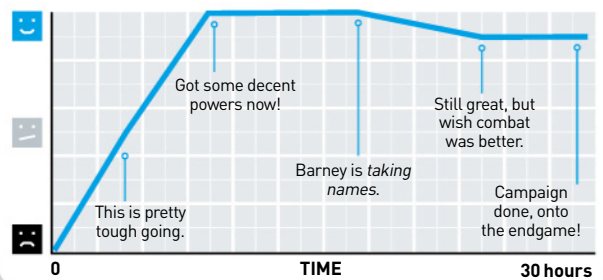
5% Making a small noise as a huge demon appears without warning.

40%
Comparing clothes like a mum shopping for her young child.

15% Whacking monsters with the weapon or spell of your choice.

9% Listening to another heartbreaking story from an emotionally tortured NPC.

COMPEL-O-GRAPH



STATPACK

100

The character level cap. Levelling eventually becomes a bit of a chore; reaching this could easily take you 150 hours or more to achieve.

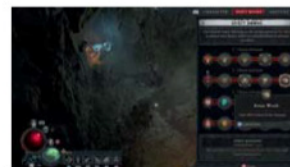
04

World Tiers (basically, difficulty levels). You can switch between unlocked World Tiers at the title screen, or at World Tier statues within the game.

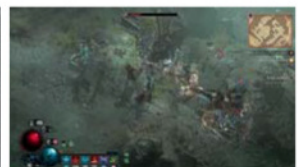
02

The number of times we encounter the randomly spawning boss, The Butcher. Coincidentally, also the number of times he kills us.

LOVING/HATING

**HELL YEAH**

We love the way that skill trees are used to make characters uniquely yours. It gives a real sense of owning the action.

**NOT TODAY, SATAN**

The always-online requirement can result in freezes even when you're playing alone. And is it really necessary?

TROPHY CABINET

LEGION KILLER



BRONZE

Kill 666 Demons, Fallen, or Goatmen. A guaranteed trophy if you keep playing.

ARMY OF BONES



SILVER

Once Sue has summoned a total of 100 skeleton buddies, this trophy is ours.

TRUE PERSEVERANCE



GOLD

Reach level 50 with a hardcore (ie permadeath) character for this.



Diablo is back, and taking no prisoners. The top-quality, lengthy campaign will be enough for some, while the endgame should prove a welcome obsession for others. **Luke Kemp**

8

PLAY

the enormous amount of it – but it's certainly disappointing. It's mechanical and stilted, with managing cooldowns playing a far larger part than it should. There's pleasure to be had from knowing that your carefully crafted character build and choice of loot dictates your powers and buffs, but moments to moment, fights are imperfect waddles of might rather than delicate dances of skill.

OBTUSE ANGEL

When the campaign is finally done, Diablo aficionados would argue, the *real* game begins. There's certainly a truth of sorts to this. There are higher difficulties to unlock, new dungeons to be crawled, better loot to be had, and the 'final, no

really, *this* is the very last' boss can only be faced on the highest difficulty at the highest tier of player levelling. With the campaign done, though, levelling up starts to become so slow you're reminded of why the word 'grind' is used.

Even if you abandon the game after you've completed the campaign, you'll still have had over 30 hours out of it. If you love grind-heavy games, though, you'll be in ironic heaven at this point. For our part, we take the opportunity to create a new character, a necromancer (Sue) and, now with the ability to skip the campaign, move one difficulty level up and go straight into some endgame content. If only we could name our little skeleton minions, too.



No need to take cover
when you can just move a
box in front of a gun.

Synapse

Mind over matter

Some of life's greatest things are combinations. Fish and chips, cookies and cream, Shrek and Donkey, and now telekinesis and guns. Synapse puts the power into your hands, shoving you into a combat mindscape with an arsenal of guns in your right hand and the ability to move objects with your mind in your left. It's one of the slickest and most tactile PSVR2 experiences to date.

Arriving on an island belonging to Colonel Conrad, a former military man gone rogue, you're aiming to track down information on an impending bioterrorist attack. You're part of the off-the-books Bureau V, which has history with the colonel. Unfortunately, locked in a coma and plugged into a mind machine, he's not talking. Fortunately, that means you can jack into the device and fight through his military (and militarised) mind to get the answers you need.

BLASTER MASTER

Part of the joy of Synapse is how simple it is to understand. With the Sense controllers in hand, it's all about what you do with each one; pointing and shooting and pointing and grabbing objects from a distance are the simplest actions in the world, feeling both responsive and impactful. Telekinesis aiming defaults to eye-tracking, and is wonderfully intuitive. With quite a range, it makes



INFO

FORMAT PSVR2

PRICE £29.99

ETA Out now

PUB nDreams

DEV nDreams

PLAYERS 1

LENGTH 1 hr per run (5-6 for full final story credits)

ACCESSIBILITY

Subtitles;
adjustable snap rotation;
movement and turn type modes;
motion vignette toggles; grip indicator; dominant hand, sprint, and telekinetic targeting



you feel like a master of the large arenas you fight through. The only other thing you use your hands for is taking cover, done by reaching out to grab a surface with the inner buttons (as you do in Horizon Call Of The Mountain), from which you can pivot yourself.

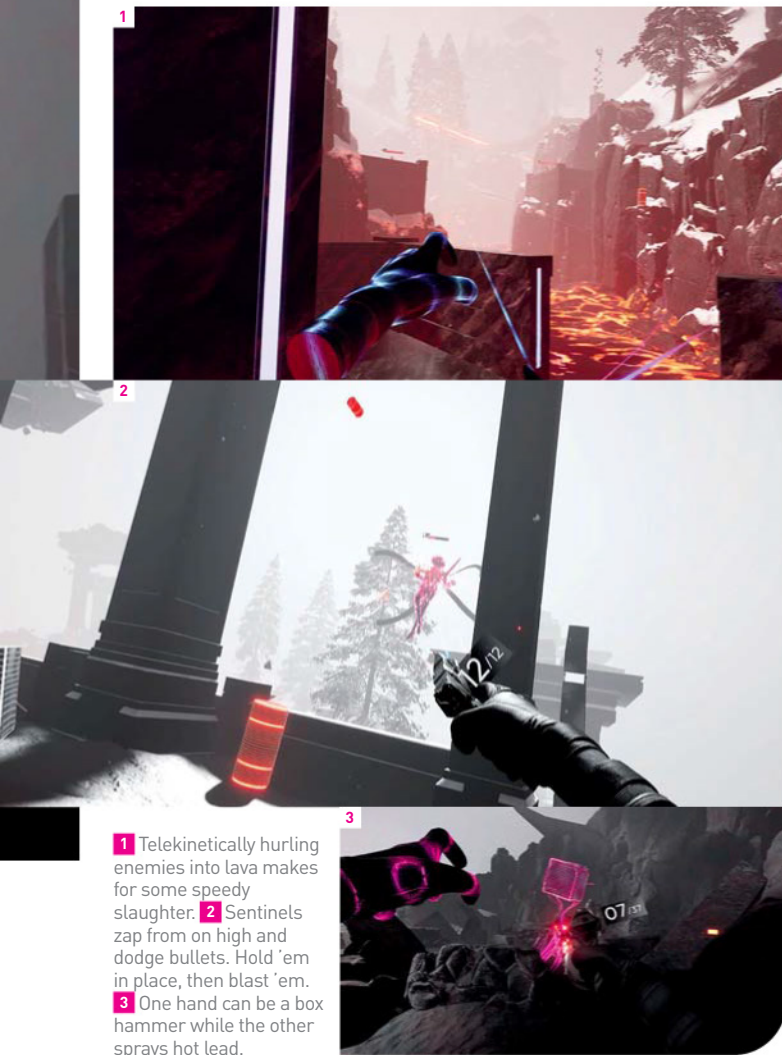
Things are perhaps a little slow to open up, with a bunch of skills locked behind a skill tree, and no upgrade really adds much complexity, only more power. But the points come flowing in soon enough, and you quickly graduate from whipping boxes and explosive barrels around (with a light touch on the trigger for the latter, squeezing only when you want to crush one and cause a mighty explosion) to adding enemy

grenades and enemies themselves into the telekinetically-manipulated mix. Draw them near to you for a better shot, or simply pound them against the walls.

Your arsenal expands too, as your pistol is joined by an SMG, shotgun, and grenade launcher. Each has a clear use, and with a maximum of two in your loadout at once, you need to find a combination that suits the run.

No matter which you pick, ammo is plentiful. Synapse is about empowering you to destroy *your* way. There's a manual element to reloading: press a button to pop the mag, then jam it back in off any surface. This might be your other hand at first, but as you get used to using telekinesis and guns in

■ Puts guns in your right hand and the ability to move objects with your mind in your left. ■



- 1 Telekinetically hurling enemies into lava makes for some speedy slaughter.
- 2 Sentinels zap from on high and dodge bullets. Hold 'em in place, then blast 'em.
- 3 One hand can be a box hammer while the other sprays hot lead.

tandem, it'll be off cover, enemy bodies, or even your belly.

TWISTING MIND

Within a roguelike structure, your goal is to make it through Conrad's preconscious, conscious, and subconscious mind in one go – nine levels in all. That means blasting waves of enemies to open up the way to the next one, while getting upgrades for your gear, plus Mind Hacks that offer per-run quirks. Those can be game-changers, doing things like making telekinetic grabs briefly hypnotise enemies into joining your side, turning final shots from ammo clips into grenades, or allowing you to see enemies through walls, though with a limited selection you'll quickly figure out your favourites.

Enemies, spawn points, and some blocked routes mean the maps have an element of randomisation, but you'll learn the structures, inducing a neat feeling of mastery rather than repetition. That goes for abilities as well, which allow you to get creative. There's no jump, for instance, but clever use of cover grabbing allows you to spider-monkey up walls or fling yourself over cover. The game rises to meet you as you get comfortable, with the full story requiring three playthroughs of increasing difficulty and complexity to complete. Yet it never gets irritating. Enemies that feel scary at first become conduits for more chaos and mastery (we only die a handful of times), meaning you always have the urge to come back.

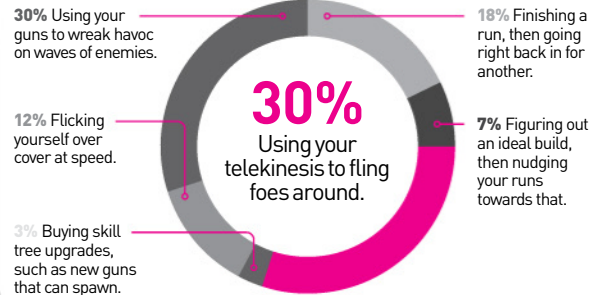


Exhilarating and creative combat means we feel truly let loose in PSVR2. The only downside is... with only nine levels to get through, we want more. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**



THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: SYNAPSE



HOW TO... MASTER YOUR ENVIRONMENT



When you begin it's easy to approach cover slowly and pick through enemies. But get comfy with moving quickly and you can turn it to your advantage, using the cover grab to dangle over edges to get the drop on enemies or run to where they can't follow by climbing up a wall.

STATPACK

03

Wonderfully surreal biomes inside this soldier's brain – you start on a beach, then fight on a snowy mountain, and finally in a step-filled temple.

05

Times we die across all three difficulties during our playthroughs. Dare we ask developer nDreams for an even harder one?

01

Pumping synth soundtrack. Get low on health, and you'll hear it rising in your headphones – it definitely raises your excitement.

LOVING/HATING



PIVOT OVER

The cover grabbing system allows you to move about in inventive ways, from scaling pillars for cover to vaulting over them.



FURIOSA RISING

The exploding Furies are a fun wrinkle, but that doesn't mean we hate the charging, exploding skeletons any less.

IS IT BETTER THAN?



YES

With similar climbing systems, Horizon Call of the Mountain's rigid linearity is less fun to play in.



NO

Control's telekinesis and gunplay combo is a bit better, though it's not available in immersive PSVR2.



YES

Predecessor Fracked's action was intense, but let down somewhat by the ageing original PSVR.



The neon-lit streets of the Miami-inspired Rockay City look the part on PS5.

Crime Boss: Rockay City

Gaslight, gatekeep, crimeboss



INFO
FORMAT PS5
PRICE £34.99
ETA Out now
PUB 505 Games
DEV Ingame Studios
PLAYERS 1-4
LENGTH 15+ hrs
ACCESSIBILITY Subtitles; difficulty options

Like a heist gone spectacularly wrong, developer Ingame Studios' debut effort is a magnificent mess. While its slick shooting can make for some enjoyable crime capers in its two co-op modes (which we'll revisit in more depth next issue), the unpolished presentation of its single-player campaign makes it difficult to wholeheartedly recommend.

It's the height of the 1990s and there's been a shakeup in the seedy underbelly of Rockay City. The leader of the town's biggest criminal faction has died and rival gangs are trying to assert control of his former territory. It's the perfect opportunity for a rookie criminal to make it big, the core premise of the single-player story mode. Dubbed Baker's Battle, this roguelike campaign thrusts you into the shoes of Travis Baker, a wannabe crime lord.

LOCK AND LOAD

Your time is split between base management, where you keep track of various resources and monitor your expanding turf, and more traditional hands-on heisting. Raiding warehouses, strip malls, and armoured trucks is entertaining, but nothing revolutionary when compared to the similar objectives on offer in genre heavyweights like PayDay 2. The roguelike elements do add an interesting twist, however, and weighing up the strengths and weaknesses of randomly generated characters adds some strategy to recruiting allies.

Unfortunately, no matter your team composition, the hit-and-miss partner AI can become

problematic in later levels as the difficulty ramps up. Their tendency to freeze at pivotal moments is frustrating, and you frequently have to leave bags of precious loot behind because they've been left in the hands of gormless squadmates now trapped behind a sea of SWAT on the other side of the map.

movie staples like the TEC-9 and AK-47. Unfortunately, the emphasis on grinding becomes a drag as you're often forced to abandon your arsenal and start again from scratch. Progression is rewarded with permanent perks, but their benefits are so slim you need to amass a fair few to feel any tangible difference.

There is novelty in its all-star cast (which boasts the likes of Chuck Norris and Danny Glover).

The one area where Crime Boss punches above its weight is in its weapon handling, enhanced by great use of the DualSense's punchy haptics and pad-speaker. There's a lot to like in the first few hours when you're getting to grips with its varied selection of weapons, which includes well-modelled renditions of heist

The terrible writing makes the plot hard to follow. There is novelty in its all-star cast (which boasts the likes of Chuck Norris and Danny Glover) but their performances are all awful. A few lines with obvious typos even made it into the finished release, a sloppy oversight but a good laugh – which says it all.



Lacklustre if played solo, but if you can reliably scrape together a squad of friends for online play the budget asking price isn't a complete robbery. **Dashiell Wood**





Matches are soon awash with huge activated powers like spirit dragons, cyclones, and electric titans.

Crash Team Rumble

Where 'wumpa' spelled backwards is still 'wumpa', apparently



INFO

FORMAT PS5 (reviewed), PS4

PRICE £24.99

ETA Out now

PUB Activision

DEV Toys For Bob

PLAYERS 8 (online)

LENGTH 4-6 hrs to unlock all characters

ACCESSIBILITY Subtitles; mono mix; controller remapping

Do one thing well' feels like antiquated advice given that most modern games throw a zillion modes at you right from the start. But Crash Team Rumble genuinely offers just a single game type, at least for now. As we covered in our preview, you collect wumpa fruit, multiply its collection by triggering sets of 'gems' in the levels, and drop it off without being KO'd. First to 2,000 wins. But it *does* do this rather well.

The game moves and feels like a Crash Bandicoot platformer, which is great. You bounce off boxes, smash through them in a whirling dervish of brightly coloured fur, and collect wumpa fruit with the usual 'chomp' sound effect. But doing so in an arena turns the familiar into something new and pleasantly competitive.

According to the loading screen tips, interns at Toys For Bob added their own input over several years of development, and the game certainly feels like it's been extensively iterated, with close matches, inventive powers, and the potential for tactical play if everyone can be bothered to work together. Even if they can't, defeat doesn't carry too much meaning since you're still rewarded for playing well on your own merit. Seeing your post-match stats lit up orange to show you were the best at *everything* is pretty awesome, even if your team did lose overall.

Melee combat feels a little thin and unsatisfying, with precious little collision feedback. Scoring a KO is not always obvious in the chaos, too, which is a

pity since it's one of the game's most glee-inducing moments.

CRASH, HIGH HAT

The Battle Pass unlocks mods for your character, including hats, backpacks, victory music, and banners, all with the usual levels of rarity. Add in micro-challenges and there's loads to

bring new Relic Stations (special powers to activate) to change the face of the matches, but even so the game arguably needs more variety in modes.

Whether the one-note activity will hold your attention for long enough to hit the level cap of 15 on every character is questionable. Without local

Defeat doesn't carry too much meaning since you're rewarded for playing well on your own merit.

keep you busy for Season 1. Toys For Bob says seasons will change roughly every three months. We assume that means in the game, of course – we already know real seasons do that. But there's plenty of space on the character unlock screen to add more than the eight there are so far, and more arenas are a cert. That will

multiplayer or even an online split-screen mode, you've got to really want to keep playing. It is at least a safe, family-friendly experience for kids, and they'll undoubtedly sink hundreds of hours into it given half a chance. For everyone else, it's a fun diversion – but it needs a lot more content if it's to thrive.



A competitive version of Crash Bandicoot's platform template is a great idea and realised with style, but it really is just the same activity on repeat, for now. Justin Towell



Not everything is as it seems, as protagonists and allies occasionally clash with one another.



The Legend Of Heroes: Trails Into Reverie

All trails lead to the end

Nihon Falcom fans have learned to be patient over the years, so for an epilogue to Trails Of Cold Steel's Erebonia arc to be released almost three years after the last entry isn't that unusual. The wait is, however, justified because Trails Into Reverie isn't just drawing a line under Rean Schwarzer and Class VII's tale, it's also completing the Crossbell arc, which has only been possible since those games were belatedly localised over the past year.

When you think over the past six games, the landlocked region of Crossbell has always been at the heart of the story as it encounters one last obstacle in its fight for independence, which means it's impossible to conclude the saga without police detective Lloyd Bannings back on duty.

For fans who've finally been able to experience the Crossbell arc with its PSP-era pixel-art visuals over the last 12 months, seeing both the SSS members and the sights of Crossbell City in full 3D will be eye-opening, Lloyd's path presented on a par with that of his Erebonian counterpart.

But does an epilogue warrant a standalone game? Reverie's story is certainly shorter than



INFO

FORMAT PS5 (reviewed), PS4

PRICE £54.99

ETA Out now

PUB NIS America

DEV Nihon Falcom

PLAYERS 1

LENGTH 30+ hrs

ACCESSIBILITY Very easy mode; high-speed mode; dual language audio; backstory



previous series entries, with events primarily set over a week rather than the year-long quests of past instalments, often revisiting locations in western Zemuria. That compression of time plus the high stakes mean you don't really get to take your time to enjoy the world building and deep character relationships Falcom is known for, even though the first chapter does involve a lot of walking around and talking to NPCs to refresh your memory on current affairs.

CROWDED PARTY

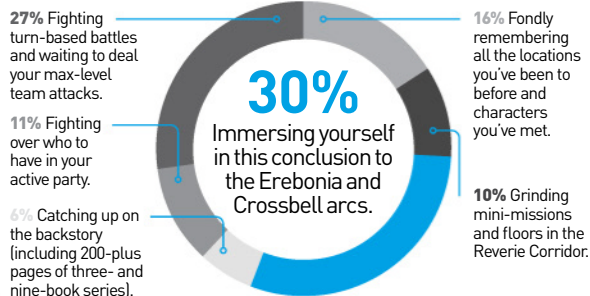
The battle mechanics haven't undergone any significant changes. Every character, even a few newcomers (which it feels excessive to add in an epilogue), starts at Level 100 with a full set of quartz equipped (though you'll be able to upgrade this

further). That also means you'll be fighting enemies to match your level, unless you opt simply to steam through it on the lowest difficulty, so there's a real incentive to maximise your whole team for the most powerful attacks. Besides link attacks, the new United Fronts enable you to use the Assault gauge for party-wide offence or support, even roping in your reserve party members.

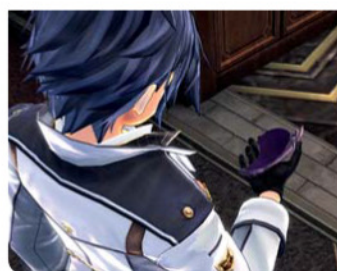
There may be too many characters to meaningfully make their mark, but it helps that chapters split up the cast to make party management more, well, manageable. This might also explain the decision to divide the story into three routes, each with its own protagonist. While you're theoretically able to swap between paths at any time, this

THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: TRAILS INTO REVERIE



HOW TO... VISIT THE REVERIE CORRIDOR



During the story, each protagonist will discover a fragment of mirror that transports them to the Reverie Corridor, a series of dungeons. You can return at any time by pressing **△** from the Trails To Walk screen. It's a great place to train, and rewards unlock additional content.

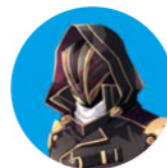
FRIENDS & ENEMIES



LLOYD BANNINGS
Leader of the Crossbell PD's SSS, he's determined to do justice by the book.

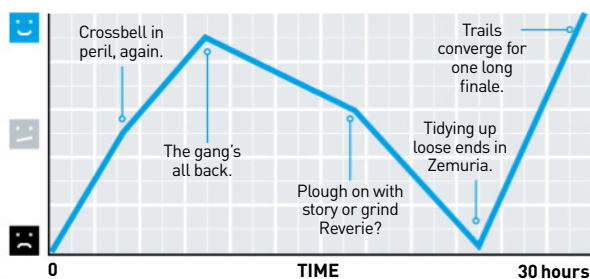


REAN SCHWARZER
Instructor at Thors Branch Campus' Class VII.



C
A mysterious knight with a full-face mask. Who is he, and what's his stake in Crossbell?

COMPEL-O-GRAPH



TROPHY CABINET



BRONZE
Win a battle with a tactical bonus of x3.0 or greater. Shouldn't take long.



SILVER
Complete 1,500 battles. (That's a lot of grind! You'll be playing a while to get this.)



GOLD
Complete all master missions and receive compensation in Reverie Corridor.



1 New characters Nadia and Lapis follow the trope of being both cute and deadly. **2** Large, formidable enemies are almost the default. **3** The game doesn't miss a chance to remind you just how staggeringly huge the Trails cast is.

is limited since a path might be locked until you've progressed a certain point on another, and sometimes the paths will converge and automatically switch to another party's perspective, even mid-battle.

PAPER-THIN TRAILS

There's certainly a lot for Trails fans to get stuck into, though less so in the main story, which, after all the previous games' events of war, occupation, and secret societies, goes to some absurd new heights that may test the patience of even the most ardent of followers. That so much side-content and backstory is stowed away in the Reverie Corridor, which is narratively divorced from the main story via a convenient amnesia plot device, also makes

this optional dungeon feel like a contrivance to allow Falcom to cram in all the character history, fan service, and minigames it couldn't find a logical way to fit in elsewhere.

Yet while there's much about Reverie that feels superfluous and unnecessary as it ropes in so many tagalong characters for yet another curtain call, it's still satisfying that the well-loved Crossbell cast get the send-off they deserve, which feels that much sweeter after we've had such a long wait for the subseries' recent remasters. Nonetheless, we're quite ready to draw a line under it all and eagerly anticipate the next chapter in the Trails saga, which will be set in the Republic Of Calvard. Hopefully the wait for that one won't be as long.



Although it feels like there's a lot of padding to justify another instalment, Reverie nonetheless gives the Trails series' Crossbell arc a satisfying conclusion. Alan Wen



Detailed environments are littered with things to try – though characters will drop hints.

4 Minutes Before Death

EDITOR'S
AWARD
PLAY

It's smoky in here.



Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective

Become your own best witness

Locked rooms and murder mysteries go hand in hand. But what if, as a ghost yourself, you have a unique perspective on how a death occurred? Able to time travel to four minutes before the victim copped it, the conundrums here are less about the method and more about nudging fate ever so slightly until you can change the events of one long night.

That's the idea that spurred Ghost Trick, an (ahem) spiritual successor to the Ace Attorney series. With the AA trilogy wrapped up, Shu Takumi wanted to explore ways to allow players to solve mysteries from a new angle. At times macabre, at others laugh-out-loud, it's a compelling mystery that, by virtue of being focussed on puzzles rather than exchanges of dialogue, feels like one you're really getting your hands on. Even without having them.

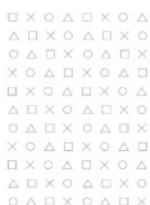
HANDS OFF

That's because as the sharply dressed Sissel, you wake after your own murder with no recollection of what happened, or even much knowledge of the world at all. All you know, thanks to a helpful fellow ghoulie named Ray, is that you can use



INFO

FORMAT PS4
PRICE £24.99
ETA Out now
PUB Capcom
DEV Capcom
PLAYERS 1
LENGTH 12 hrs
ACCESSIBILITY
Large text



'ghost tricks', but that you only have one night in which to pursue the truth behind your death before you fade away.

And your post-life powers aren't a handy add-on to the usual human abilities – they're all you have to work with. Without legs, Sissel must hop between objects that have spirit cores, some of which can be messed with poltergeist-style. You can pop an umbrella open, spin bike gears, flap a flag.

Between bouts of bucket-kicking, you spend a lot of time trying to get from A to B by chaining together sequences of tricks, often creating domino-like chains of events with NPCs who react the same way each time. Lower a chandelier, for instance, and a writer penning a manuscript by its light will walk back to crank it up again. With

no time limits or ways of locking yourself out, these breathers are charming to explore.

DEAD RINGER

However, discover a body and the mode of play changes, becoming more tense as you're thrown back four minutes before their death into a more walled-off puzzle (often with the deceased's spirit in tow). You need to pinpoint a series of events to avert the death, often revolving around dishing out your tricks in a certain order to make chains of life-saving mischief. Despite the time limit, you can retry as often as you want, and if you alter a character's fate dramatically enough you'll initiate a Fate Change checkpoint.

The solutions are always fixed, but there's a joyous

THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: GHOST TRICK: PD

24% Figuring out just the right order in which to unleash your inner poltergeist.

15% Obsessing over the slick character model animations.

3% Riding phone lines to the wrong place. There's little to see here!

31%
Pressing **X** to ghost-trick an object. It never gets old.

20% Feeling dizzy (in a good way) from so many story twists.

7% Getting stumped, steam coming out of your ears.

FRIENDS & ENEMIES



LYNNE

Wanted for your murder, this rookie cop has to solve... a different crime!



KAMILA

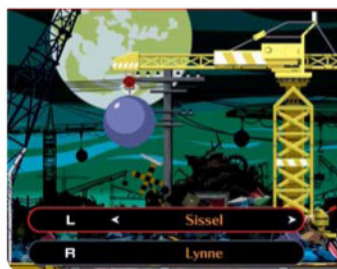
She's thrown into dangerous situations, and you need to keep her out of trouble.



MISSILE

This loyal warrior won't let a couple of deaths stop him from protecting his friends.

HOW TO... GET BONUSES



Complete sliding puzzles once you've finished the game to unlock concept art, switch between the original soundtrack and the equally excellent rearranged one (and unlock them in a listening mode), and customise the borders around the original 4:3 presentation with unlocked artwork.

LOVING/HATING



HAUNTING CHARACTERS

Even minor characters make fantastic impressions and are wonderful to watch interacting with one another.



DEAD WAIT

Miss a window and the wait to retry can be long. With events timed so precisely, it'd be hard to change, but a speed-up would be nice.

IS IT BETTER THAN?



YES

Ace Attorney Trilogy has remasters of three top games, but Ghost Trick's enhancements are better.



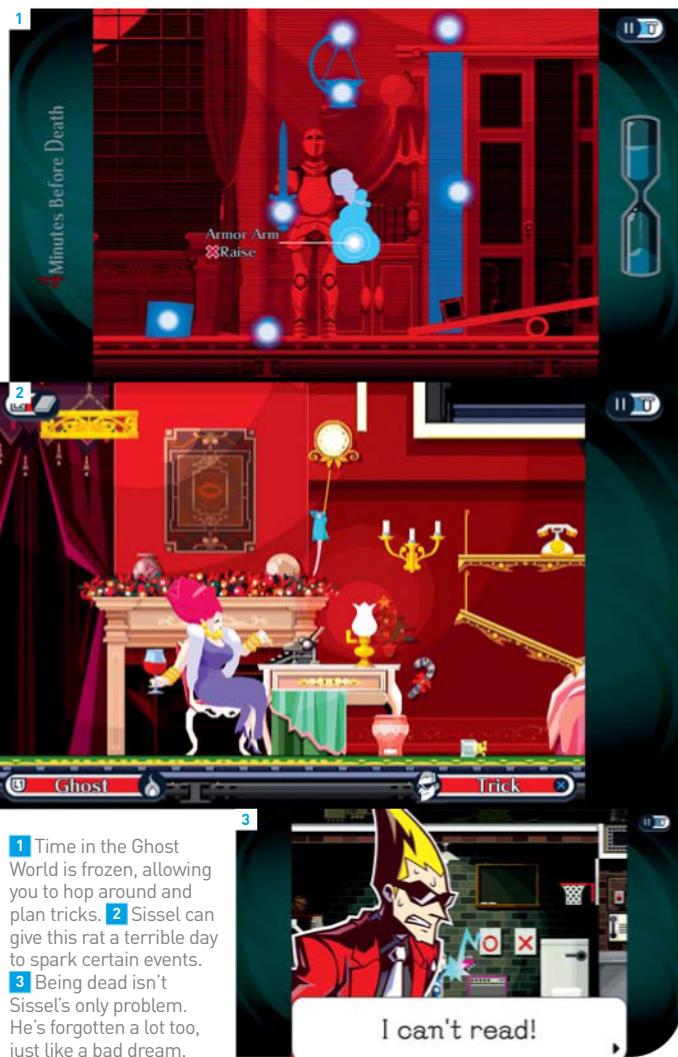
YES

The underrated Murdered: Soul Suspect has similar ideas, but they aren't as well-implemented.



YES

AI: The Somnium Files' mind-diving is similar to the Ghost World, but lacks Ghost Trick's immediacy.



1 Time in the Ghost World is frozen, allowing you to hop around and plan tricks. **2** Sissel can give this rat a terrible day to spark certain events. **3** Being dead isn't Sissel's only problem. He's forgotten a lot too, just like a bad dream.

creativity in playing around with the objects in a room to see what you can interact with, and in trying out new combinations that might alter the way tricks play out. Swing a sword and it comes very close to knocking a medicine bottle back to its owner? Now you must find a way to extend that reach.

The down side is that the generous retries can drag as you await the perfect moment for trickery. It becomes more obvious in later, tougher puzzles when things get more exacting (and checkpoints sparser). However, the puzzles themselves don't drag. Each one always has a new twist or mechanic, and more often than not Sissel's pondering nudges you in the right direction (as do the death scenes, on occasion). Some work

better than others, but none outstay their welcome, including an insta-fail stealth escort mission that is somehow fun.

Throughout the course of the story you hop between maps, travelling via phone lines. The beautifully drawn areas feature enough sliced-open buildings to make Wes Anderson blush, and are filled with wonderfully animated, excellently written characters that endear from the first dialogue box.

Needless to say, Sissel's death and identity are wrapped up in a conspiracy that he uncovers over the course of saving those around him, many of whom will offer him assistance (excitable pomeranian Missile is a standout). Hardly a faded shade of an idea, but a deeply engrossing mystery to solve.



First-class puzzling that feels like little else, beautifully presented, wonderfully planned, and with a gripping story to boot. Don't let this case grow cold. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**

9

PLAY



Dordogne

Going with the flow of time



INFO

FORMAT PS5, PS4

PRICE £15.99

ETA Out now

PUB Focus Entertainment

DEV Un Je Ne Sais Quoi, Unimation

PLAYERS 1

LENGTH 4+ hrs

ACCESSIBILITY Basic subtitle option; volume sliders

Mimi cannot remember anything before her 13th birthday. Venturing to the now-empty home of her late grandmother, Nora, Mimi attempts to make sense of her amnesia – and why her father is so against her rediscovering the past. To unravel the tangle that pulls her between her loved ones, Mimi must walk two timelines.

Childhood memories are a puzzle to piece together even for the most well-adjusted person, only beginning to make sense once we use our adult knowledge to interpret the experiences of our younger selves. Mimi knows her father and grandmother didn't get on, but doesn't know why. Exploring (and re-exploring) the rooms of Nora's home in the present, you unearth letters that bring an unspoken family history into view. However, the full picture lies in the memories that Mimi lost, and it's there in the past that Dordogne tugs at your heart strings with full force.

BACK TO THE SOURCE

Along the shore of the titular river, Mimi begins to remember what happened the summer before her 13th birthday. In playable flashbacks, you collect stickers, snap photos, and record the sounds of these sights. It's all in aid of filling the pages of a binder shared by Mimi and Nora, though the journalling mechanics are a lot less expressive than those in, say, *Season: A Letter To The Future*.

You also pick up words for fridge-magnet-style poems as you explore, and it's these poetry

mechanics we want to most write home about – young Mimi can find a *lot* of stickers. Though the binder is an important emotional beat, you'll find that by the end of the summer you've completed only a few pages, all of which look a little bare. This is particularly baffling in what is otherwise a visually

pair resolve to capture a dragon. Their practice calls to the mythical beast are presented as a simple Simon Says minigame, but this brief moment of interactivity greatly enhances the impact of each time the call reappears as a musical motif.

The alluded-to confrontation with the fantastical is pivotal for

It's there in the past that Dordogne tugs at your heart strings with full force.

rich game thanks to stunning watercolour visual direction.

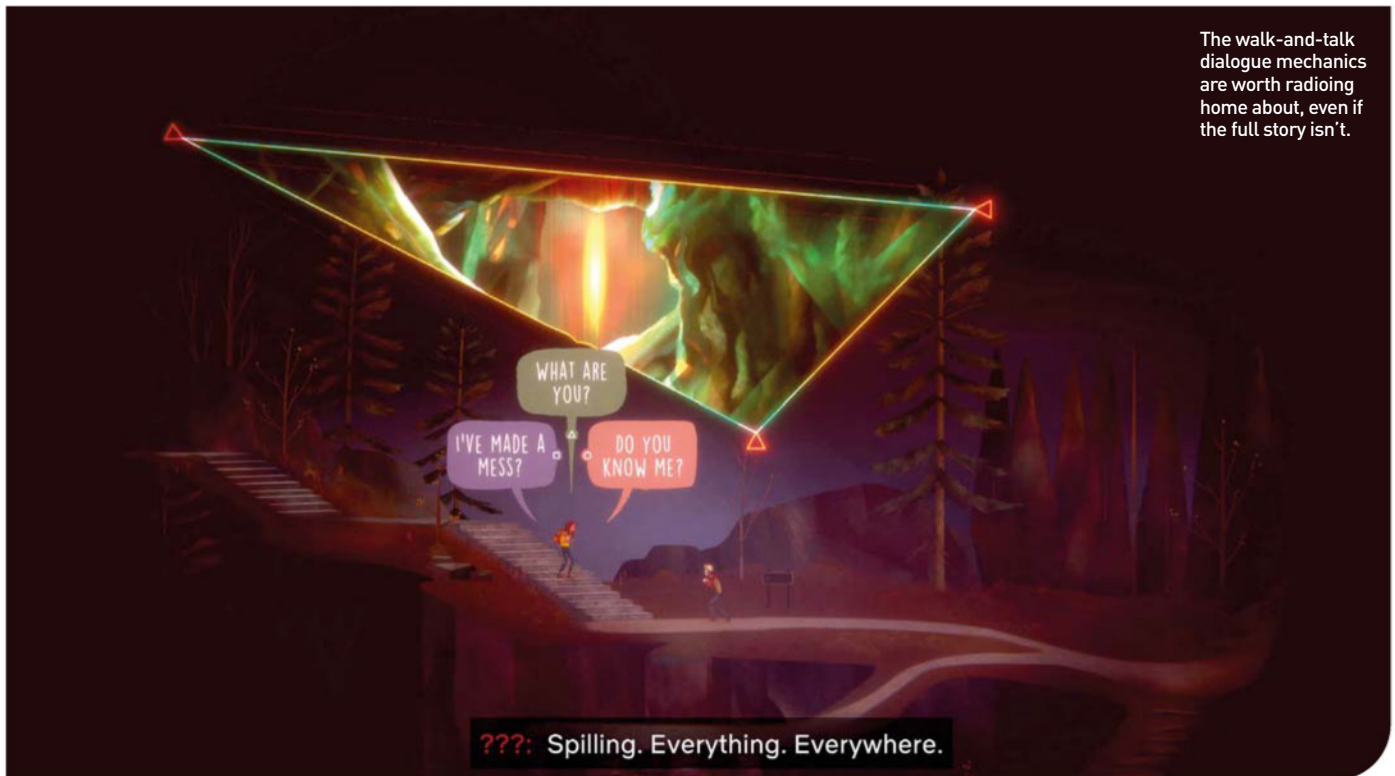
Even with its storybook stylings and young protagonist, Dordogne holds the fantastical at arm's length for much of its runtime. Leading up to the emotional peak that finally reels in this element, Mimi befriends a boy named Renaud and the

both past and present Mimi, her arc culminating in an unexpectedly grounded note. While some will find this resolution hasty, perhaps even unsatisfying, we tear up when we reach it. Mimi has chased her past, and come back with the best thing anyone looking back can hope to find: peace.



A watercolour world presented alongside journalling mechanics that don't quite capture it at its best. Otherwise, it's short, sweet, and bound to leave you sobbing. **Jess Kinghorn**





The walk-and-talk dialogue mechanics are worth radioing home about, even if the full story isn't.

Oxenfree II: Lost Signals

Tune in or tune out?



INFO

FORMAT PS5, PS4

PRICE £18.99

ETA Out now

PUB Netflix Inc.

DEV Night School Studio

PLAYERS 1

LENGTH 7+ hrs

ACCESSIBILITY

Various subtitle sizes; big text option; alternate font option; content warning links to an external site

Say you could do it all over again – would you? This is the question at the heart of Night School's sequel as we follow new protagonist Riley Poverly, who is having the absolute worst first day on the job.

Returning to her hometown of Camena after a long absence was hard enough, but before she can begin to make her peace with it, otherworldly interference threatens to tear apart everything she knew. The straight-talking, athletic Riley is joined by creative hiking buddy Jacob, walkie-talkie in hand. The world-saving pair are supported by an eclectic cast that includes their bubbly boss Evelyn, a sailor possessed by New Weird wanderlust, and the local high school's advice line. They are largely on their own, though, and as a new gang of thinly sketched teens is introduced at the heart of the mystery, we can't help missing Alex and her friends.

GET ON OUR WAVELENGTH

Walk-and-talk dialogue mechanics see a refined return, with characters believably interrupting one another as event triggers overlap, and conversations now carrying on as you move between areas. It's a polished implementation of a system we hope to see more of in other games, with lots of chatter scoring larger, more vibrant environments.

Camena's map differs from the easy-to-navigate loop of Edwards Island – backtracking is far more necessary. The new climbing gear is an attempt to offer a navigational compromise but ends up feeling mechanically slight, though taking a pulled-out

view of the scenery is helpful as the story's supernatural shenanigans force Jacob and Riley to jump all over the shop.

The action skips around like a warped VHS tape, the creepiest moments presented with pleasingly analogue visual flourishes – but if you've heard this song and dance before,

There are a few bright ideas, including a memorable tussle in a converted community centre, and puzzles that are zhuzhed up by a touch of time travel (though ultimately Time Tears are *chronically* underutilised).

While we like Riley and Jacob (despite the latter's unfortunate habit of becoming Mr Exposition)

The creepiest moments are presented with pleasingly analogue visual flourishes.

there's little to entice you back for another verse. We still enjoy the creepy vibes of radio messages from beyond, but the first time this was fuel to the very personal stakes of Alex's story, Lost Signals expands the stakes way outward and ends up with something much less compelling as a result.

the worst part is that their arc is swallowed up by a repeat of the first game's ending that also muddles what we liked about the original conclusion to Alex's story. Are you reading us? Lost Signals is a much less interesting retread of its predecessor that has lost the thread of what made the first game so beloved.



A misjudged leap forward. While refined and polished, its fresh ideas cannot disguise the fact that we've passed that one parked car on Edwards Island before. **Jess Kinghorn**





The new Qatar track suits F1 cars better than MotoGP bikes, playing like old Jerez.

F1 23

The varied, substantial game last year's should have been

For all its authenticity, F1 23's biggest new feature is the CGI-tastic, fictional F1 soap opera Braking Point 2. Brilliantly manipulative antagonist Devon Butler and our wishy washy 'hero' Aiden Jackson return, and there are some ten hours of new racing drama to enjoy. But what if we told you that's not even the biggest new element? The ambassador really is spoiling us...

Meet F1 World, which sees you completing mini championships, bite-sized challenges, and even non-F1 supercar events in a constant quest for loot. And it is 'loot' as gamers know it, with the universal colour coding of blue, orange, and purple denoting a mod's rarity, before you equip it to your custom F1 car to raise its numerical rating from 100 towards 1,000. This score is a very broad performance indicator when entering F1 World events, which also have a rating. It's still the same activity on track, essentially, but does give seasoned veterans something new to get their teeth into, while introducing newbies to how the game works. It should have legs too, as community events are added over time.

There's also a new, Gran Turismo-like emphasis on good-mannered driving, with a Player License level from D-A indicating your conduct level on the track. This will affect collision detection in online lobbies and lock off some F1 World events



INFO

FORMAT PS5 (reviewed), PS4

PRICE £59.99

ETA Out now

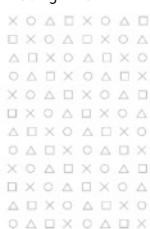
PUB Electronic Arts

DEV Codemasters

PLAYERS 1-2

LENGTH 10 hrs (story mode)

ACCESSIBILITY
Subtitles; mono mix; tinnitus relief filter; colourblind mode for Dynamic Racing Line



until you're deemed civilised enough to partake in them.

Career mode is still there, of course, which will be a relief for players who just want to get back into the game with the new season's tracks and drivers without worrying about Epic Brakes and their +2 ERS stat buff. After 14 years of evolution, career mode is immaculate, and bolstered here by new, unique scenes presented by a virtual Natalie Pinkham.

MAX AND CHEESE

But what about Braking Point 2? Pleasingly, the latest instalment of Aiden's story is great. With deeper world-building thanks to an improved social feed that comments with detail on your decisions and race results, there

are also some genuine surprises in the story beats. The playable parts are short and their objectives far from unusual, but the quality of the writing, acting, and production is significantly higher than last time. It wouldn't be right to discuss spoilers for the storyline here, so just know that if you enjoyed the last Braking Point mode, this one will more than satisfy your craving for more.

Behind the wheel, the game is its usual smooth self, bolstered by improved pad control, enhanced AI that does more to avoid accidents while also being adept at causing its own, and the new tracks (Qatar and Las Vegas, the latter passing through the city streets) and welcome changes to existing

Behind the wheel, the game is its usual smooth self, bolstered by enhanced AI.

THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: F1 23

27% Playing career mode. Sure, it's largely unchanged, but so good.

13% Staring at the new facial animations in Braking Point 2.

1% Putting stickers in the sticker album like you're six again.

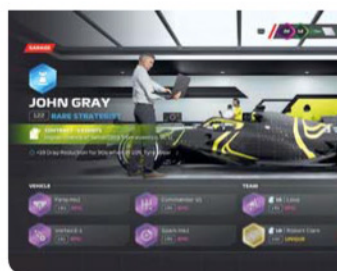
40%

Driving the car, always monitoring the Overtake Button's battery.

14% Wondering how good the 1991 season would be with this engine.

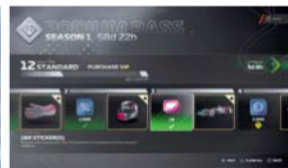
5% Upgrading your F1 World car and unlocking new, rare mods.

HOW TO... RAISE YOUR TECH LEVEL



In the new F1 World mode, complete series and challenges to win rewards. From there, go to the Garage and equip the highest-numbered ones (and boost their level if you have cash). Use your faster car to win more races, unlocking higher level events. Repeat until you hit 1,000.

LOVING/HATING



CHAMPAGNE

Seeing female F1 drivers competing in races. They may be fictional, but this needs to happen for real in the modern era.

REAL PAIN

Seeing all the cool things we *could* have unlocked if we'd spent some more real money on the VIP Podium Pass. Boo.

STATPACK

26

Circuits to race on. That's all the ones from the entire 2023 racing season, plus China, France, and Portugal as a bonus. You're spoiled!

23

Teams to race for, both real and fictional, across F1, F2, F1 World's custom car, and Braking Point's yellow-and-purple liveried Konnorsport.

10

Supercars to unlock and roar around in, either through taking part in invitationals and meeting criteria, or by buying them with tokens.

TROPHY CABINET



BRONZE

Just complete 23 races – they can be any races, not the full official calendar.



SILVER

Nowt to do with Carlos Sainz; achieve Safety Rating A by driving cleanly in F1 World.



GOLD

Win the Driver's World Championship. Preferably WITHIN THE COST CAP. Ahem.



1 Braking Point features returning faces, including the Butler family.

2 F1 World uses names from your friends list to populate the grid. 3 Do well to earn loot, to get stickers... to complete photos... to unlock trivia (deep breath).



ones make the experience feel surprisingly fresh.

WARNING FLAG

Nothing's perfect, of course, and this game's no exception. The whole game still feels a little 'reined in', like it's on its best behaviour. So that means cars are unwilling to flip compared to those in the games from the early 2010s, special effects are slightly understated, and everything feels rather clinical. F1 World also feels like it loses its focus after the first 12 hours or so, as your car is upgraded beyond the level needed for most of your unlocked events, and yet some are still way harder to win than their rating would suggest, mainly thanks to a few AI outliers with higher ratings than the event itself.

But with all that said, there really aren't many racing games with this level of sophistication, authenticity, and sheer breadth. Whatever you want to do, however you want to play it, there are tens or even hundreds of hours of high-quality racing to be had, all complete with recognisable likenesses of the sport's most famous faces, on the track and off.

With red flags returning to introduce standing restarts, there's very little that isn't simulated, short of Alonso lovingly passing on advice for his teammate. It really is the F1 world, only in playable form, and if you have any interest in the sport whatsoever you should pick it up and take it for a spin. Yes, even if you already own last year's entry.

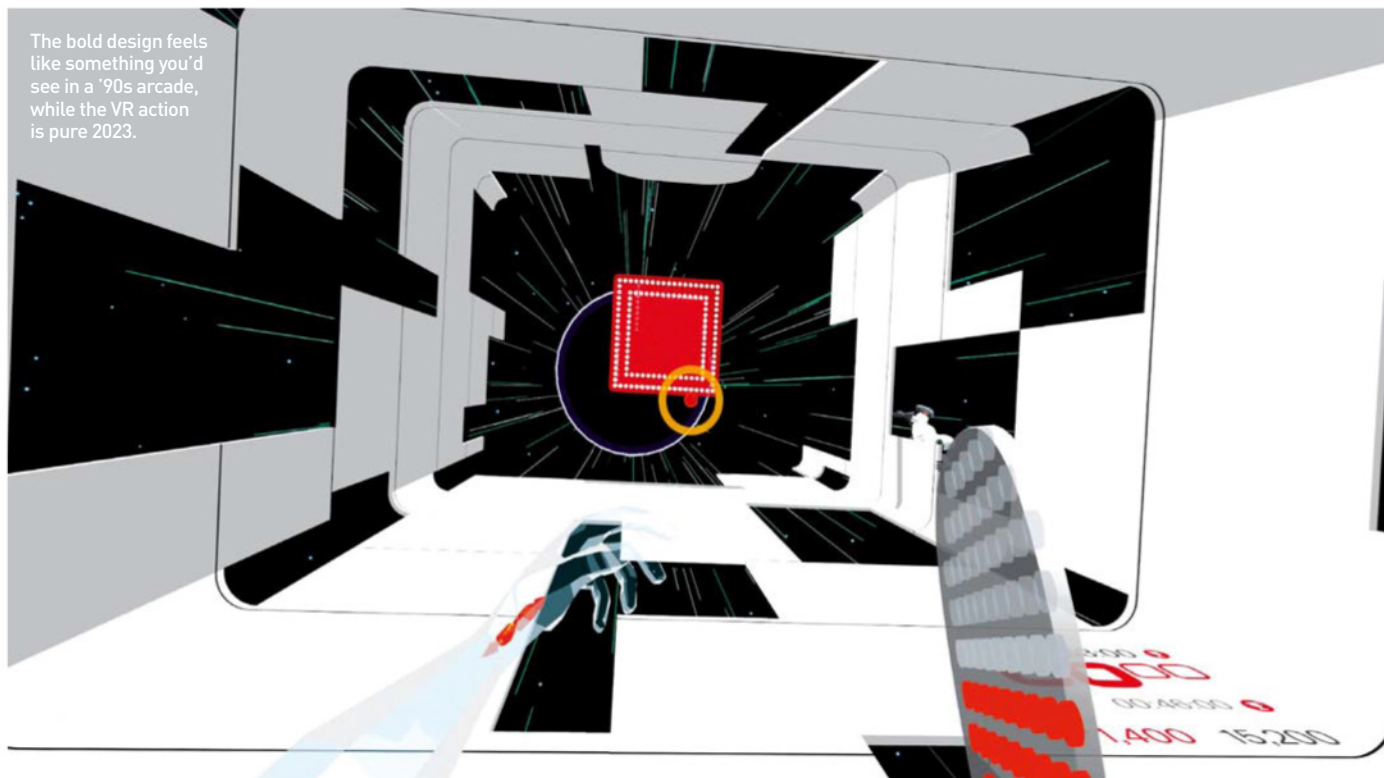


An involved, improved story mode and the progression-based F1 World complement the exemplary career. It's the best year-on-year update since F1 2013. Justin Towell

8

PLAY

The bold design feels like something you'd see in a '90s arcade, while the VR action is pure 2023.



C-Smash VRS

Serving up a winner



INFO

FORMAT PSVR2
PRICE £24.49
ETA Out now
PUB RapidEye Movers
DEV Wolf & Wood
PLAYERS 1-2
LENGTH 2 hrs (one playthrough)
ACCESSIBILITY Teleport or full movement; left- or right-handed; adjustable haptic vibration and controller sensitivity; play standing or seated



Look at it, would you just look at it. Amid the clutter of photoreal shooters and elaborate fantasy epics dripping in flashy visual sparkles, this minimalist blast from the past simply demands to be played. Simplicity and directness are a gaming comfort blanket you just want to wrap up in sometimes, and it's a style of game that works wonderfully in VR.

A PSVR2 revival of Sega's cult arcade and Dreamcast hit Cosmic Smash (which was never released for the home console outside of Japan), C-Smash VRS recalls that time in the mid-'90s when games were crisp and clean, and when strong art direction and bold design choices trumped monetisation and hiring Hollywood A-listers to shuffle into a sound booth to Krusty The Clown their way through dry dialogue.

That's what C-Smash VRS isn't – so what is it exactly? That's simple: it's zero-gravity squash meets Arkanoid set on floating courts hurtling towards a black hole and, well, *something*. And it's one of PSVR2's best games. The simple premise is executed wonderfully as you bat, smash, and lob shots at moving blocks to win the courts – some offer power-ups, some explode, some take multiple hits; it's all very '90s.

The single-player game has two modes. In Zen mode you plot a route through the slickly minimalist courts with retries, while Challenge mode is, as you would expect, tougher, as here you have to restart the entire run all over again if you lose. While you'll complete Zen mode in around

two hours, there are multiple custom routes through, ensuring it'll take a while to rank on all of them.

A BREAKOUT HIT

Don't expect this to be a chaotic game like Beat Saber either. C-Smash VRS is a far more chill experience overall. While there's

and ball idea to life. It can occasionally drift and feel a little random, but overall the sense of accuracy, of being able to pick your shots, works well. Some players may feel C-Smash VRS lacks content, but that's a little like saying Tetris only has one idea – when a game's this pure, adding too much will only dilute

It's zero-gravity squash meets Arkanoid set on floating courts hurtling towards a black hole.

a timer to beat, and you will lunge, swipe, and get sweaty, this is a game that rewards rhythm and timing. C-Smash VRS is closer in DNA to Rez Infinite, and that game's composer, Ken Ishii, does a fine job here too.

The controls work well and PSVR2's haptics bring the bat

the experience. Nonetheless, enter these courts with your eyes open: this is a simple game. If you love arcade games, where rankings, points, and perfecting your skills matter, then C-Smash VRS serves up the goods.

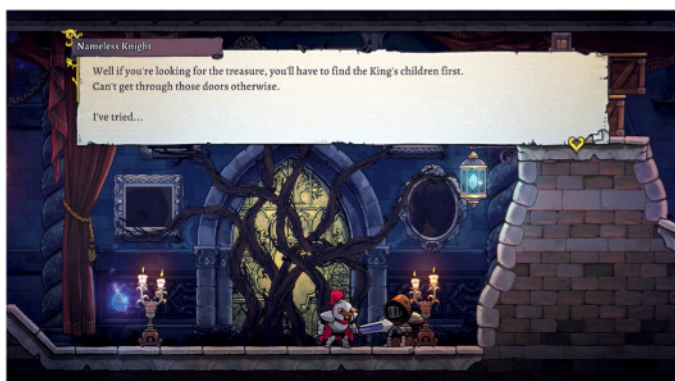
Now, where's that Virtua Tennis VR remake?



Perhaps the idea could have been developed a bit further, but C-Smash VRS works wonderfully in PSVR2. Sometimes a simple idea well executed is all you need. **Ian Dean**



INFO FORMAT PS5 (reviewed), PS4 PRICE £19.99 ETA Out now
PUB Cellar Door Games DEV Cellar Door Games PLAYERS 1



Rogue Legacy 2

Knight after knight

Few studios can claim responsibility for establishing a new genre of gaming, but Cellar Door Games managed just that when it coined the name 'roguelite' (a roguelike with the twist that you become stronger over subsequent runs). But that badge of honour comes at a heavy price. *Rogue Legacy 2* enters a market that's flooded with roguelites built upon the very template that Cellar Door established over a decade ago.

Fortunately, that template still has room for experimentation, and Cellar Door knows it, using the sequel to double down on all the core design pillars of the original. This is still the *Rogue Legacy* you know and love, then, one that sees you storming a

a new element of strategy and variety into combat. Every knight you select at the start of each run will fit into one of 15 different classes, each boasting its own unique style of play. The classes range from classic archetypes within the fantasy mould, such as the slow but powerful Barbarian, to... well, a character like The Chef, who can cook a stew to replenish their health and deflect attacks with their frying pan.

FAMILY JEWELS

These classes are a great addition, but merely the tip of the iceberg for *Rogue Legacy 2*, which also features an overhauled traits system, a deep and rewarding progression tree, and exceptional environmental diversity and boss design, as well as a rich story all presented

The new class system folds an extra element of strategy and variety into combat.

hazard-filled, absurdly labyrinthine castle via a steady stream of randomised knights (each one the genealogical heir to the last), but that addictive gameplay loop has been modified, modulated, magnified, and matured.

The most notable difference is in the class system, which folds

with gorgeous 2.5D visual flair. The original *Rogue Legacy* exemplified an experience where no two runs played the same. Somehow, the sequel makes that debut effort seem like a first draft. It may not be inventing a genre, but it's certainly giving the competition its forbear spawned a run for its money.



Everything you'd want from a *Rogue Legacy* sequel, and more, this dramatically enriches and expands its genre-defining blueprint to the point of near perfection. **Alex Avard**



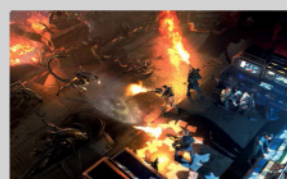
THREE TO PLAY



PSN games you might have missed

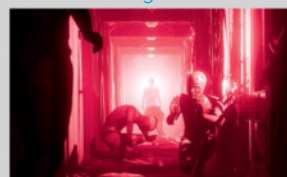


Every month, loads of games come to the PS Store. You'd be hard-pressed to play them all, so we're looking at some that didn't quite make the cut. This month we're plumbing the depths of terror, and finding mascot mayhem on the other side of it.



For years, the *Aliens* movies and related media have been successful thanks to a winning combination of iconic creature designs and dystopian tales about

futuristic big corporations. *Aliens: Dark Descent* doesn't change much of that, presenting a competently told rendition of the series' greatest hits, but its real-time strategy stylings ramp the tension all the way up. There are annoying wrinkles to this; for just one example, your squad is made up of individual named soldiers you will get attached to, but they all move through missions as one in such a cumbersome way that stealth can be just as frustrating as it is heart-pounding.



Speaking of that particular knife edge, next up is *Layers of Fear*. No, we're not travelling through time to take a look at this – this year's release collects together

Bloober's 2016 and 2019 hallway horrors, along with all DLC, as one continuous experience, and has the original game's name slapped on top like a bloody bow. This isn't a simple rerelease, either: it features visuals remade in Unreal Engine 5 and more than a few new surprises besides. The new tech makes for some deliciously moody scenery, but stitching all these creepy corridors together makes for a terror that rather outstays its welcome by the end. Unfortunately, there are only so many issues redecorating can fix.



Now, we finally emerge from spelunking through the dark to blink away the bright colours of *Sonic Origins Plus*. This expanded rerelease adds 12 more games to the

collection, alongside new playable characters, music packs, and game modes. The solid brick wall this collection runs into at full pelt, however, is that the performance of its emulated titles is often lacking even on PS5. The original releases didn't have the highest frame count to begin with, mind, but it's definitely stark on modern hardware. If you missed out on the first go around of this collection, the Plus edition remains easy to recommend despite everything – including the fact it still doesn't include *Sonic 3*'s original music.

DIGITAL
OFFER

FOR PRINT
SUBSCRIPTION
DEALS, TURN
TO PAGE 74



Download your first digital issue for FREE*

JUST SEARCH FOR 'PLAY – THE MAGAZINE' ON THESE SELECTED PLATFORMS...



***TERMS AND CONDITIONS:** The free trial is only available to new subscribers. If you have previously subscribed then payment will be taken immediately. Your subscription automatically renews unless auto-renewal is turned off at least 24 hours before the end of the current subscription period. Payment will be charged to your iTunes, Amazon or Google Play account at confirmation of purchase. You will be charged for renewal within 24 hours prior to the end of the current period, for the same duration and at the current subscription rate for that product. You can manage your subscriptions and turn off auto-renewal by going to your Account Settings after purchase. No cancellation of the current subscription is allowed during an active subscription period. This does not affect your statutory rights. Any unused portion of a free trial period, if offered, will be forfeited when you purchase a subscription.

RetroStation



106 FPS gamechangers

The ten titles that altered shooting games forever

HIGHLIGHTS

CLASSIC GAME: PARASITE EVE 2 [102](#) | MEMORY CARD: SILENT HILL 3 [104](#) | DEFENDING: VANILLE [105](#)
FPS GAMECHANGERS [106](#) | PLUS POINTS: GHOSTBUSTERS: THE VIDEO GAME REMASTERED [112](#)
A BRIEF HISTORY OF... OTS CAMERAS [113](#) | PARTING SHOT: WHAT REMAINS OF EDITH FINCH [114](#)



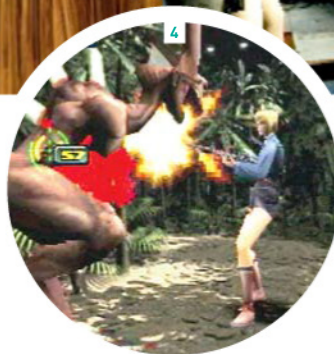
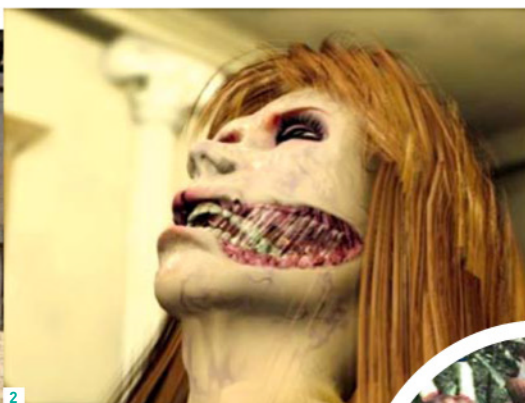


CLASSIC GAME

Parasite Eve 2

A survival horror left looking for a host





The late '90s and early '00s were, in many ways, the golden age of survival horror. It's having a renaissance at the moment, with every new game looking back at what came before and hoping to improve the formula. With several remakes and remasters on the cards, it's surprising that *Parasite Eve* still hasn't been revisited; the sequel, *Parasite Eve 2*, remains beloved for many.

Both games' stories are loosely adapted from a 1995 novel by Hideaki Sena. It features many of the tropes we saw coming out of Japan at the time: shady government groups; grotesque monsters; suspense; and supernatural abilities. It was an ideal fit for the PlayStation era. Squaresoft, known now as Square Enix, saw the middling popularity of the first game, along with the success of the *Resident Evil* games, and pulled out all the stops for this sequel. *Resident Evil* writer and director Kenichi Iwano was brought on board to ensure the game met expectations and would fit in with the survival horror landscape as it was at the time.

water ones revolve around restoring health, wind elements inflict status ailments on monsters, and earth buffs or debuffs damage stats. These abilities can be used in tandem with physical attacks. For example, the earth-powered Energy Shot improves the damage done by rounds fired, and it's possible to use wind attacks to immobilise a target to then unleash shotgun rounds at.

You can find or craft body armour, ammunition, weapons, and equipment throughout the environment, and balance gunplay with tactical use of elements, which pull from an MP pool. Unlike in RPGs of that era (*Final Fantasy IX* was released in the same year, for example), random battles are sidelined so you can see fights ahead of you and decide how to approach them. In many ways, *Parasite Eve 2* didn't only buck the trends, it anticipated many game mechanics we would see regularly a decade down the line.

NEW STRAIN

This fusion of two genres was *Parasite Eve 2*'s greatest asset. Killing NMCs earns you experience points needed to

needed an angle in order to stand out. Capcom brought out dinosaurs with *Dino Crisis*, and Konami went with surreal drama in *Silent Hill*, which left Squaresoft to fill in a gap with science-fiction trappings and magic. But even with a unique take on the genre and relatively complimentary reviews, the new series was left floundering, only seeing a new release, *The 3rd Birthday*, on PSP in 2010.

Why the series is now being left behind when others are finding new audiences is anyone's guess. It's not like *Parasite Eve 2* was lacking in any significant way. Some moments remain memorable to this day – take the early encounter with an NMC called Stranger, who emerges from a human you run into. As the human stands up, their body begins to tear apart as the NMC within them bursts out, face ripping to shreds as the monstrous creature flexes its jaws. Even amid all the genre mashups this was a game built on fear. It's well worth another look. ■

“In many ways it didn't only buck the trends, it anticipated many game mechanics we would see regularly a decade down the line.”

What emerged was wholly original, despite its weighty inspirations. *Parasite Eve 2* walked a line between survival horror and fantasy as the developers introduced RPG mechanics alongside the then-popular tank controls and high tension. Protagonist Aya Brea, an agent of MIST (Mitochondrial Investigation and Suppression Team) doesn't rely on weapons alone to fight NMCs (Neo-Mitochondrial Creatures), she also uses 'parasite energy'. Spells, basically.

Following an elemental system, fire spells are used for offensive abilities,

level up Aya's powers, allowing you to craft her as you see fit. The developers even removed money from the game, replacing it with BP ('bounty points'), which are earned by dispatching the game's creatures. You'd think that, with all these RPG elements, the game would be bloated, but there is no filler. Only the best mechanics from each genre were pulled in, and these rode alongside an enjoyable, if often outlandish, narrative.

Because the market was being flooded by companies looking to capture horror lightning in a bottle, games



INFO

PUB Squaresoft
DEV Squaresoft
RELEASED 2000

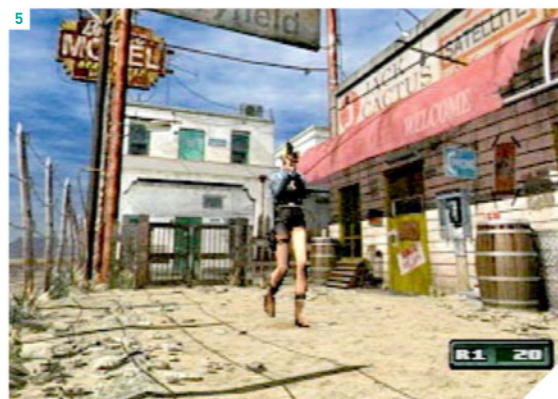
GET IT NOW
Approx. £30, eBay;
£5.79, PS Store

NEED TO KNOW

1 *Parasite Eve* was also adapted into a 1997 movie, sadly only distributed in Japan.

2 The original *Parasite Eve* game was never officially released in PAL regions.

3 Composer Naoshi Mizuta was a Capcom employee before jumping ship to Squaresoft.



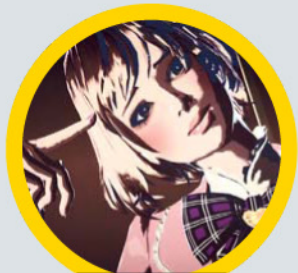
DON'T DELETE

Save icons for these historical August moments spin in the PLAY hive mind. Do you remember this?



5 YEARS

Divinity: Original Sin II was a huge RPG from Larian Studios. Funded via Kickstarter, it's remembered for challenging combat and an endearing cast, including Red Prince (a giant lizard) and Fane (a surprisingly pleasant skeleton).



10 YEARS

Killer Is Dead follows gun-armed swordsman Mondo Zappa on a bizarre adventure. Offering more style than, well, anything else, it remains a great time thanks to the winning combo of blades and bullets. Oh, there's no room to discuss the Gigolo missions. Pity...



15 YEARS

Ratchet & Clank: Quest For Booty is a pint-sized platform adventure following on from Tools Of Destruction. The titular duo are separated for a chunk of the game, leaving Ratchet to team up with Talwyn Apogee instead.

MEMORY CARD

Silent Hill 3

One hell of a homecoming even after 20 years



Heather Mason is one of PlayStation's most memorable survival horror protagonists.

There's an oft-misremembered saying that's something like, 'All you need to make a survival horror game is a girl and a gun.' This sequel has both in spades, as you accompany sassy teen protagonist Heather Mason into an ever-deepening nightmare.

Predecessor **Silent Hill 2** remains critically acclaimed, though is frequently criticised for being slower-paced, much less combat-focussed, and generally disinterested in the titular town's occult history compared to other entries. The third game was an attempt to course correct on all fronts, even beginning life as a rail shooter. The project took on a more recognisable form at the cost of a truncated development, with many members of the team simultaneously working on what would later become **Silent Hill 4: The Room**. As a result, **Silent Hill 3** is a shock of horror that feels like a strangled yelp. Despite that, it's many fans' favourite entry – including our own games editor's.

Reader **JM Baron** also has great taste, calling it the "Best Silent Hill ever!"

ALL ABOUT THE ANGLES

But we can't simply ignore the passage of time.

Reader **Michael Lumsden** begins, "Absolutely all of them hold up as horror games – the controls on the other hand..."

While **Silent Hill 3**'s use of fixed camera angles remains deliciously moody, it's an artistic choice that can feel disorienting when paired with tank controls.

MEMORY CARD



INFO

PUB Konami
DEV Team Silent, Konami
RELEASED ON PlayStation 2
RELEASE 2003
IF YOU LIKE THAT, TRY THIS...
Avoid the dismal HD Collection, and instead check out **Forbidden Siren**, along with more recent favourites **Detention** and **Signalis**.

Lumsden goes on to say, "Going back to tank controls is a bit of a challenge, but I gotta dig deep – I used to love this format of gameplay when I was young!"

Horror games are far slicker nowadays, but **Silent Hill 3** still occupies a special place in our hearts.

Reader **Jeffrey Sainz** puts it a much spicier way, challenging that it's "Still better than **TLOU**." Hmm...

BYTE-SIZE BITS

Essential numbers that add together to tell you everything you need to know about the game.

300,000

Copies had been sold by the end of 2003, with the game also topping sales charts in Japan during its release month – this was one well-loved series.

40

Developers worked on it, fewer than on its predecessor.

03

Endings. Only the 'Normal' one unlocks on a first playthrough. The others need specific actions to be taken on a second run.



DEFENDING

Vanille

Mahin Kesore proves Vanille isn't as vanilla as she seems

Overhearing someone playing the now-classic Final Fantasy XIII you could almost believe a tense Wimbledon championship final was on screen, but in fact the grunts and groans you're hearing is the gleeful reaction party member Vanille has to, well, almost anything.

Even though she is one of the main catalysts for the events of the game, and secretly the reason for most of the problems the team faces, like any self-centred teen she shoves it all to the back of her mind and allows a childlike sense of naivety to propel her forwards, and honestly... me too. Nothing says 'the youth of today' like forgetting about all your problems and demanding people smell the flowers and live in the moment.

Together with her 'friend' Fang, she forms an Australian sari-wearing tag team which seems to have some lesbian subtext going on (Final Fantasy said gay rights – or at least as close as you'd expect the series to get in 2009). Together they become l'Cie, cursed beings who gain powers in exchange for having to complete a task called a Focus, or risk transforming into mindless monsters (well, even more of a mindless monster than Vanille already is). The mission they're given ends up making plenty of others into l'Cie too – including most of the game's main characters. It all ends with Vanille and Fang sacrificing themselves by turning into crystal to stop two planets colliding, the pair immortalised as statues forming one of the final images as Leona Lewis' My Hands plays in the background. The high-pitched moaning and groaning finally silenced, Vanille makes the ultimate sacrifice alongside a loved one. An unsung hero, if you discount her own squeals.



MY NAME IS OERBA DIA VANILLE. I'M A L'CIE FROM GRAN PULSE. AND TO EVERYBODY ON COCOON, EVIL."

Well... to be fair, she did turn a six-year old kid into crystal. That's not exactly nice.



INFO

MAIN GAMES
Final Fantasy XIII

STATS

Fang and Vanille are based on the Norse myth of Lif and Lífþrasir, those names meaning "life" and "eager for life".

The FFXIII development team at one point were going to make Vanille the main character, but Lightning stole the thunder.

The exclusive Saboteur ability Vanille and Fang share may be a nod to their role in FFXIII's story.

SPIN-OFFS

Final Fantasy XIII-2; Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII; Dissidia Final Fantasy

HOW TO PLAY?
£10 approx, eBay

THE LIST

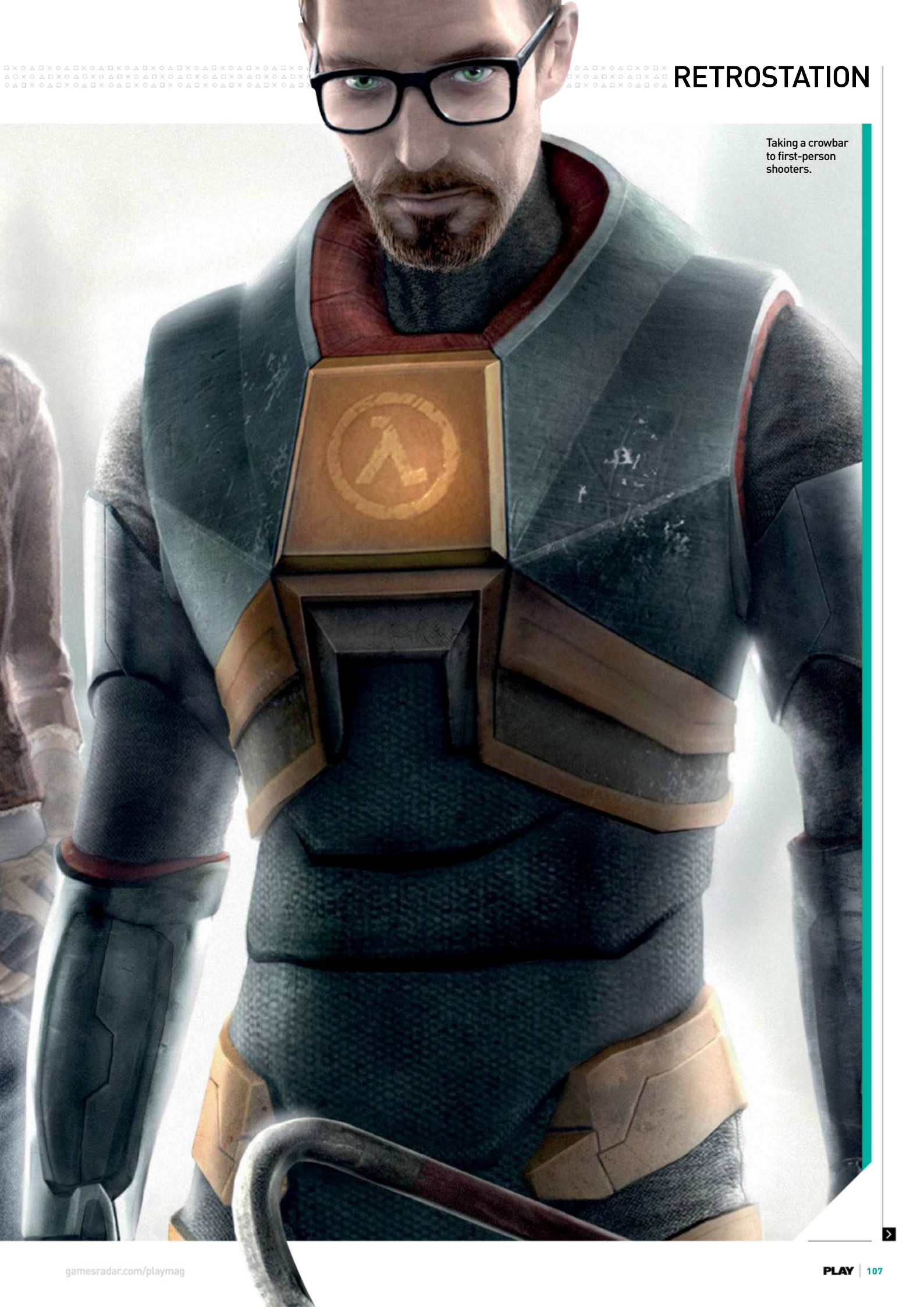
SHOOT FOR THE STARS

Meet the **FPS gamechangers** that left the rest of the genre scrambling to keep up

The first-person shooter is a mercurial concept. Is it defined by deathmatches or cinematic campaigns? Battle royale or loot-shooting? The truth is that the genre has never been just one thing. And three decades into its existence, it refuses to stand still – instead strafing and bunny-hopping into new and unexplored territory.

What we can nail down are its punctuation points, the moments when one FPS game has fundamentally altered the rules for what the genre can and can't be. Grab a coffee, flick off the safety catch, and join us over the page for an explosive celebration.





RETROSTATION

Taking a crowbar to first-person shooters.



PUBG: Battlegrounds

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **PUB** KRAFTON
DEV PUBG STUDIOS / **RELEASED** 2018

01 Warzone couldn't have pulled us collectively through lockdown if PUBG hadn't already set the template for the FPS as battle royale. It's janky, but it's all here: the parachute jump with 99 other players; the encroaching circle; the too-quiet ghost towns that promise both the possibility of life-saving gear and life-ending enemy encounters. The genius was to bottle the survival horror of DayZ in a format that always produced a climax, ending on a dramatic high that capitalised on all that tension rather than letting it dissipate into nothing. If there's a more compelling shape for multiplayer shooting, we've yet to see it.



Far Cry 2

FORMAT PS3 / **PUB** UBISOFT
DEV UBISOFT MONTREAL / **RELEASED** 2008

03 Before Ubisoft's experimental sequel to a German jungle shooter, open worlds were the preserve of RPGs and Grand Theft Auto. First-person shooters, by contrast, were invariably set in shiny corridors of varying widths. Far Cry 2 changed all that, setting you loose in a sprawling East African country wracked by civil war. Jeeps and hang gliders made the scale manageable (not to mention beautiful), while the freedom of movement meant you could approach an outpost from any angle. Later Far Cry games eased up on the misery and malaria pills in favour of a chaotic holiday vibe that only made the series even more popular and influential.



Overwatch

FORMAT PS4 / **PUB** BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT
DEV BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT / **RELEASED** 2016

02 Team Fortress 2 did the cartoony team shooter thing first, but Blizzard's masterstroke was to pull over the MOBA's focus on individuals and ultimates. Every character in Overwatch is a planet unto itself, with a unique set of skills to master, a fleshed-out backstory, and a complementary role to play on the field alongside their counterparts. It's a world away from the interchangeable skins and avatars that populated the multiplayer shooters of yore – and a setup that opened the door for much better and broader representation in a genre that had always centred on gruff white blokes.



Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

FORMAT PS3 / **PUB** ACTIVISION
DEV INFINITY WARD / **RELEASED** 2007

04 The early COD games went in for spectacle, but Modern Warfare was something else: the invention of full-on first-person cinema. The sell was a little like Cyberpunk's braindancing: the forbidden pleasure of occupying perspectives in the most extreme circumstances imaginable. Where else could you be executed in front of a TV audience, or crash-land at the epicentre of a nuclear blast, then walk away for a cup of tea afterwards? Modern Warfare's story defined the tightly-controlled pace of the FPS going forwards; if you've played any Call Of Duty campaign in the past decade, then you know exactly how big Infinity Ward's footprint is.



Doom (2016)

FORMAT PS4 / PUB BETHESDA SOFTWORKS / DEV ID SOFTWARE / RELEASED 2016

05

For years, Id Software was stumbling in the dark when it came to rebooting Doom – literally living in the shadow of the gloomy Doom 3, and struggling to square its rip-and-tear legacy with the scripted, story-driven model popularised by Call Of Duty. Things finally started to make sense when the studio came up with the glory kill, a melee button press that would reward you with a gratuitous animation of a cacodemon's eye popping out when you drew in close.

More than showy spectacle, the glory kill ushered in a new mode of engagement for first-person shooters. Rather than hanging back and ducking behind cover, as they had been doing since Halo and Call Of Duty introduced recharging health, players were suddenly encouraged to fire forwards when under pressure,

“More than showy spectacle, the glory kill ushered in a new mode of engagement for first-person shooters.”

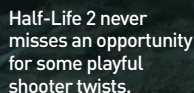
exploding an opponent in exchange for a shower of health pickups.

What's more, the glory kill formed just part of a deadly dance that fans

of Doom's 2016 reboot and recent sequel have come to adore. Id built single-player arenas that resembled the flowing multiplayer maps of Quake III, and taught you a cardinal rule – that to stand still was to embrace death. The Doom Slayer circled his opponents like a shark, double jumping and dashing out

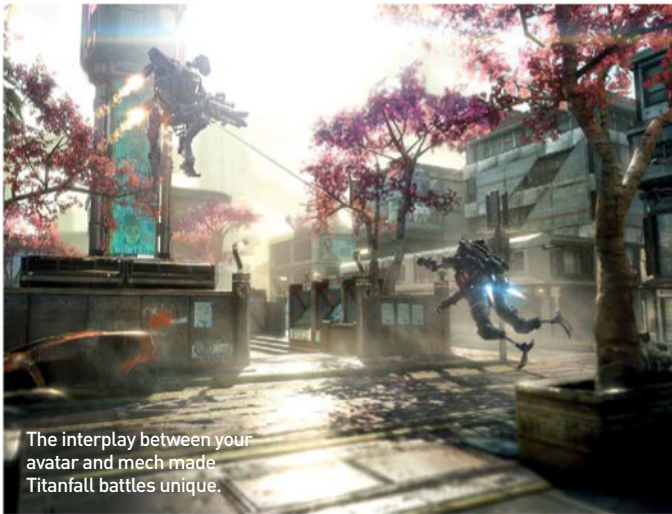
from under incoming rockets in order to take the upper hand. Along with Titanfall, Doom inspired a new focus on movement in the

FPS genre that has continued to this day, and is evident in everything from Apex Legends to indie hits like Neon White and Ghostrunner.



FORMAT PS3 / PUB VALVE / DEV VALVE / RELEASED 2007

example of Gordon and Alyx. And without the environmental interactivity of *City 17*, it's very tricky to imagine *Dishonored*, *Prey*, or *Deathloop*. In the absence of the latter, we'd be down a PLAY 10/10.



The interplay between your avatar and mech made Titanfall battles unique.

Titanfall 2

FORMAT PS4 / PUB EA
DEV RESPAWN ENTERTAINMENT / RELEASED 2016

07 While never a particularly big seller – that honour would go to its battle royale spinoff, Apex Legends – the Titanfall series has nonetheless been hugely influential on other first-person shooters. The former Infinity Ward team at Respawn adapted Mirror's-Edge-style parkour for combat by slowing it down, allowing you to wallrun and squeeze off a handful of choice shots in the same motion, and proving things don't have to go ever-faster to be more exciting. A slew of Call Of Duty games in the 2010s followed suit, and you can still feel Titanfall's flow in the likes of Warzone today. As a bonus, Titanfall 2 includes one of the best shooter campaigns ever made.



Not really sure where the 'border' actually lies. Is it drawn in space?

Borderlands

FORMAT PS4, PS3 / PUB 2K
DEV GEARBOX SOFTWARE / RELEASED 2009

08 Bungie has Gearbox to thank for laying down the blueprint for the loot-shooter long before Destiny took its haphazard route to the top of the pile. Strange as it is to imagine now, nobody had ever successfully applied the RPG levelling and random number generation of Diablo to a different genre before. The four co-op player roles in Borderlands mapped roughly to traditional D&D party positions (tank, berserker, ranger, mage) but now benefitted from the immediacy and unpredictability of first-person action. The format might be a little tired today, having been copied in The Division, Warframe, and Outriders, to name but a few. But that moreish loop cannot be denied.



We guess the time for showing our papers has passed?

Medal Of Honor

FORMAT PS1 / PUB ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEV DREAMWORKS INTERACTIVE / RELEASED 1999

09 It's hard to imagine a time when the DualShock controller was an innovation, and not every PlayStation owner had access to two thumbsticks. It's even harder to go back and play an FPS which straddled that period, and suffered as a result of those limitations. Holding down a shoulder button to steer your rifle? It's hardly the stuff Saving Private Ryan was made of. Yet other parts of Medal Of Honor, like its undercover sequences and mournful score, shaped the tone of war shooters for decades to come. And it left the PlayStation audience hungry for more PC-style first-person action.



A chainsaw is the best way to deal with a Pinky.

Doom

FORMAT PS4, PS3, PS1 / PUB BETHESDA SOFTWARES
DEV ID SOFTWARE / RELEASED 1993

10 In 1993, Johns were poised to change the world. By devising a groundbreaking engine that could conjure both vertical space and a suite of garish colours, John Carmack took 3D gaming beyond simple mazes for the first time. John Romero, meanwhile, designed levels that made the player feel like a rat in a trap, introducing both speed and horror into the fundamental DNA of the genre. This may be the final entry on our list, but know this: there *is* no FPS without Doom. Jettisoning story and forefronting demons inspired by their games of D&D, Id Software set a breakneck pace for peers to follow.

PLUS POINTS

Ghostbusters: The Video Game Remastered

Ghostbusters fan? This might be the game of your streams



1 The proton packs look and sound exactly as they should. **2** No, you don't get to drive the Ecto-1, something acknowledged via a joke late in the game. **3** It's Slimer (again). In the Sedgewick hotel (again). Get him!

Forget Sanctum Of Slime, the game based on the 2016 film, and Spirits Unleashed. This is *the* Ghostbusters game. As it's the 2019

remaster it lacks the original's multiplayer mode, but the polish that makes this a much smoother experience more than makes up for that.

If you're a fan of the films who missed this the first two times, you're in for a treat. All four original 'busters lend their likenesses and voices to the game, and Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis helped write the script (though the extent of

their contribution is purposefully obfuscated). It's genuinely funny, benefits from music from the movies, and Bill Murray's performance is far superior to the phoned-in appearance he made in Ghostbusters: Afterlife.¹

The experience of capturing a ghost is as much fun now as it was in 2009. Wear it down with your proton beam, then wrestle it into a trap while the rest of the team (you play as a new recruit) help. Bustin' really *does* make us feel good.

EGON IN 60 SECONDS

It shows its age in a few ways. Some character models have dated poorly (Ray



INFO

PUB Mad Dog Games

DEV Terminal Reality, Saber Interactive

RELEASED 2019

Stantz's face looks like it was moulded from Play-Doh by a small child), and there are a few design decisions that wouldn't be made today. Boss fights in tiny arenas that make getting knocked down an inevitability? Ugh!

Nonetheless, fans will easily forgive these and other minor complaints.² The atmosphere is perfect, it's fun far more often than not, and it does make you feel like a Ghostbuster. Aykroyd at the time said it was essentially Ghostbusters 3. It's easy to see why.

FOOTNOTES ¹ The stories of his reluctance to reprise the role come as no surprise when you see what he does with it. ² Mainly the overfamiliarity of early locations and enemies.

HAVE YOUR SAY

Readers tell us what they think of our choice



GAME WAS AMAZING, A GEM"

Jeffrey Sainz



LOVED IT. GREAT STORY AND IT WAS A REALLY FUN GAME. AI WAS A LITTLE JANKY BUT HONESTLY IT WAS AN AWESOME CONTINUATION"

Wes Ekiss



JUST LIKE SCARFACE."

John Rinyu

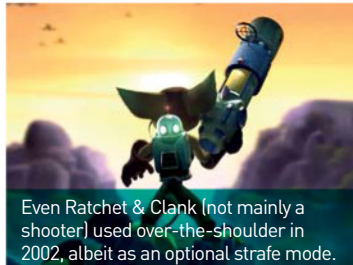
► PSP on PS P(lus) with **Killzone Liberation**

A BRIEF HISTORY OF OTS cameras

The over-the-shoulder games that abandoned any and all personal space



2002's *Splinter Cell* was one of the first shooters to offer players an over-the-shoulder viewpoint when firing.



Even *Ratchet & Clank* (not mainly a shooter) used over-the-shoulder in 2002, albeit as an optional strafe mode.



Kill Switch, released a year later, again let us come closer when aiming, further establishing OTS and third-person view.

The *Ghost Recon* series offered OTS from *Advanced Warfighter* (2006) onwards.

Some games, like the *Max Payne* series, opted out of OTS camera use. Fans petitioned Hideo Kojima to include it in *MGS3*, but he wanted to wait for better tech.

SAY 'AAAH'

Close enough to smell

When you hear about the origins of the over-the-shoulder camera, 2005's *Resident Evil 4* is mentioned most often. It wasn't the first game to use OTS, but it is the most popular example of permanent, non-optional over-the-shoulder aiming. It has such an impact in *Resi 4* because it's integral to the game's atmosphere – coming this close to the undead was exciting.



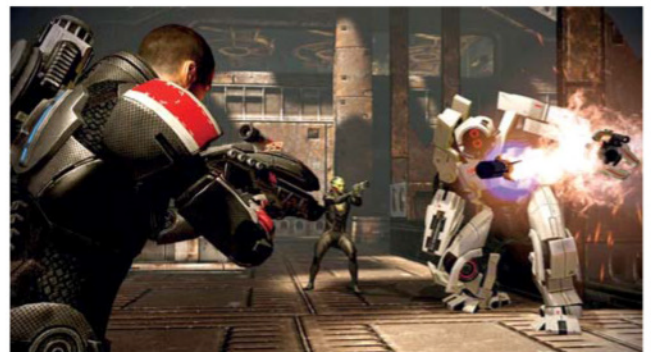
THE **RESIDENT EVIL** REMAKES USE OTS IN THE SAME WAY **RESI 4** DID, WITH SPECTACULAR, CREEPY RESULTS.



■ *Dead Space* (2008) deliberately uses the *Resident Evil 4*-style camera.



■ *Skyrim*'s optional OTS aiming made the game accessible to more players.



■ Cover shooting and over-the-shoulder perspective often go hand-in-hand now, like they do in the *Mass Effect* series. It feels so real!



■ 2018's *God Of War* only cuts away from over-the-shoulder view during cutscenes. The rest of the time, you're as close to Kratos as you'll ever want to get.



AT THE EDGE

A different kind of OTS horror

While *God Of War* has been lauded for its camera, *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* used the same method before it in 2017. The horror the camera captures from close-up while Senua travels Viking hell is mainly emotional, though the battles do feel visceral. The close camera makes you wonder precisely what you're missing.

► Next issue: not last, nor least, it's the history of **Final Fantasy**



What Remains Of Edith Finch hides one of the most horrifying deaths in videogames behind its walls

NEXT MONTH

ON SALE 22 AUGUST

LORDS OF THE FALLEN

Hands-on – what's harder than one soulslike world? Two at once!

PLAY

ISSUE 30 / SEPTEMBER 2023

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA

Editorial

Editor **Oscar Taylor-Kent** @MrOscarTK
oscar.taylor-kent@futurenet.com – 01225 442244
Managing Art Editor **Milford Coppock** @milfcoppock
Operations Editor **Miriam McDonald** @crinolinerobot
Games Editor **Jessica Kinghorn** @koeniginKatze
Contributing Writer **Dashiell Wood** @dashiellwood
Designer **Ryan Robbins**
Editorial Director, Games **Tony Mott**
Content Director, Games **Daniel Dawkins**
Group Art Director **Warren Brown**

Contributors

Alex Avar, Vikki Blake, Ian Dean, Malindy Hetfeld, Luke Kemp, Mahin Kesore, Daniel Lipscombe, Jeremy Peel, Alex Spencer, Justin Towell, Alan Wen

Cover Marvel's Spider-Man 2 © Insomniac Games, Sony. All Rights Reserved

Advertising

Media packs are available on request 01225 442244
GCD UK **Clare Dove clare.dove@futurenet.com**
Account Director **Kevin Stoddart kevin.stoddart@futurenet.com**

International Licensing

PLAY is available for licensing and syndication. To find out more, contact us at licensing@futurenet.com or view our available content at www.futurecontenthub.com. Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**

Subscriptions

SUBSCRIPTION DELAYS Disruption remains within UK and international delivery networks. Please allow up to seven days before contacting us about a late delivery to help@magazinesdirect.com

New orders & enquiries **+44 (0)330 333 1113**
Subscriber renewals **+44 (0)330 333 4333**
Subscriber email enquiries help@myfuture.co.uk
New online orders & enquiries help@magazinesdirect.com
Consumer Revenues Director, Specialist Brands **Sharon Todd**

Circulation

Circulation Manager **Matthew De Lima**

Production

Group Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Senior Production Manager **Matt Eglinton**
Senior Ad Production Manager **Jo Crosby**
Production Manager **Vivienne Calvert**
Ad Production Manager **Andrew Durrant**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**

Management

MD, Games & Entertainment **Matthew Pierce**
Commercial Finance Director **Tania Brunning**
SVP Games, Entertainment & Tech **Kevin Addley**
Global Design Director **Rodney Dive**

Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd on behalf of Future
Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU. For enquiries, please email: mfcommunications@futurenet.com

ISSN 27540421

We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this magazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards.

All contents © 2023 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher: Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008889) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

If you submit material to us, you warrant that you own the material and/or have the necessary rights/permissions to supply the material and you automatically grant Future and its licensees a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in any/all issues and/or editions of publications, in any format published worldwide and on associated websites, social media channels and associated products. Any material you submit is sent at your own risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents, subcontractors or licensees shall be liable for loss or damage. We assume all unsolicited material is for publication unless otherwise stated, and reserve the right to edit, amend, adapt all submissions.

PLAY, ISSN 27540421, is published 13 times a year (twice in May) by Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, UK. The US annual subscription price is \$181.87 Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc, c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Application to Mail at Periodicals Postage Prices is Pending at Brooklyn NY 11256. US POSTMASTER: Send address changes to PLAY, World Container Inc, c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Subscription records are maintained at Future Publishing, c/o Air Business Subscriptions, Rockwood House, Perrywood Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 3DH, UK



Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief Executive Officer **Jon Steinberg**
Non-Executive Chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief Financial and Strategy Officer **Penny Ladkin-Brand**
Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244



VALTHIRIAN ARC Hero School Story 2

VALTHIRIAN ARC



**Not all heroes are born, many are forged
by the finest Hero School – yours.**



Give your students in-field
experience with strategic turn
based combat



Select your buildings and
curate the best curriculum
for your students



It's not all work and no play.
Blow off some steam with
plenty of mini-games!

BUY NOW ON: STEAM EARLY ACCESS

COMING TO CONSOLES IN 2023

NINTENDO SWITCH PS5 PS4 XBOX XS

pqube.co.uk/valthirian-arc-2

© 2022 Agaté. All rights reserved. Published by PQube Ltd. All images, logos and product names are property of their respective owners.

Agaté  **pqube**

